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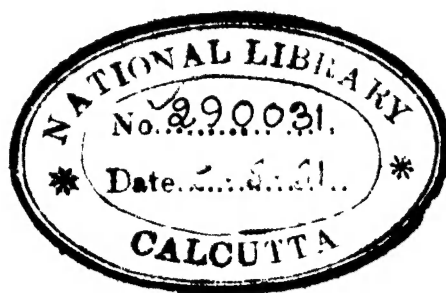
INDIAN RESEARCH SERIES—III

THE RELIGION OF TAGORE

IN THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL

BY

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THE CHRISTIAN LITERATURE SOCIETY FOR INDIA

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TO
MY FORMER AND PRESENT STUDENTS
AT
GURUKUL

P R E F A C E

My interest in Tagore dates back to 1913, the year in which the Swedish Academy awarded him the Nobel Prize. The candidates for the Nobel Prize in Literature are always able to rouse the interest of the Swedish public, and this was especially the case that year, because the prize was given, for the first time, to a poet from the East. The heart of the young student was immediately taken captive by interest in the charming representative of the poetry and wisdom of the old country of sages; and it has never since been able to liberate itself.

For many years, however, this remained chiefly a literary interest. But through an interview I had with the Poet at Santiniketan in 1937 my attention was keenly drawn to his personal religion. Since then I have studied his writings with the single aim of finding out what, exactly, was his religious position.

It might have remained a study for study's sake, had not my friend, the Director of the Church of Sweden Mission, the Rev. A. Baefverfeldt, in 1943 asked me to deliver a lecture at Uppsala on Tagore and his relation with the Christian faith. For that purpose I had to bring the results of my studies into an orderly and systematic form, and in so doing I found what a wealth of light Tagore's relation with Christianity was able to shed upon the problem of the relationship of Christianity with modern Hinduism as a whole. I therefore took the bold decision to make an elaborate study on the subject with a view to having it published. Needless to say, I do not claim to have given an exhaustive answer to the problem. I am fully conscious of the many defects of my work. Yet I hope I have been able to touch upon some of its vital points, and I should be glad if my endeavour could be of some help to further investigation.

I wish to record here my gratitude to my friends at Santiniketan, who very generously received me on my second visit there in 1946 and helped me in finding books and articles needed for my study and gave me most valuable information about the religious life and views of Tagore. I should especially mention Mr. S. K. George, Acharia Kshiti Mohan Sen and Mr. P. Mukerji, whose exhaustive Bengali biography of Tagore I regret I have not been able to read. I am also indebted to Mr. Narayanaswamy Aiyer, who has given me many

valuable hints and discussed with me orally and by correspondence several important points in my investigation.

I am especially grateful to Dr. J. F. Butler of the C.L.S. for the great and untiring interest he has taken in the publication of my book. He has been kind enough to go through the whole manuscript with me and has willingly discussed any points I wished to raise. His deep knowledge of philosophy has been of great help to me. If I have not been able to accept all his suggestions, it may be due to my inability to view things from a thoroughly philosophical point of view. He has also improved considerably upon the language of the book, and if it is not too much disfigured by 'Swedicisms' and other mistakes the credit must go to him.

Last but not least I wish to thank my wife for her faithful help not only in typing my manuscript but in many other ways.

My book, I am afraid, will be a disappointment to many of Tagore's friends and admirers. My Christian convictions have compelled my evaluation of his religion to take a course which may be very different from theirs. But my admiration for this great son of the East has not been thereby diminished.

Gurukul, Madras
Easter 1948.

S. E.

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INTRODUCTION

The Hindu religion is passing through a deep crisis, probably one of the most momentous in the whole course of its long history. Ancient beliefs, views and customs give way to or are being transformed by new outlooks on the world, fresh views of life and new social ideas and ethical ideals.

The course of the crisis is obvious. It is, broadly speaking, the impact upon India of Western civilisation. With the force of an earthquake it has come upon the East in general and upon India especially,¹ changing and transforming its ancient heritage in all departments of life—political, social, economic, educational, moral and religious. In the following words Professor D. S. Sarma, in his great work *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, describes the forces that are at work in this transformation: 'The most important of these forces is, of course, the spread of English education, which broke the intellectual isolation of the Indian mind and brought it into contact with Western science, literature and history. The result of this was a great mental expansion similar to that which the European nations experienced at the time of Revival of Classical Learning in the 15th and 16th centuries. A new world of ideas revealed itself to the wondering gaze of our young students in schools and colleges. In place of the extravagant mythical geography, legendary history and pseudo-science with which they had been acquainted came sober and correct ideas about the configuration of the earth, the rise and fall of nations and the unalterable laws of Nature. In the light of this new knowledge many an evil custom in Hindu society hitherto regarded as a decree of God appeared in its true colours as the folly of man. *Sa'ti*, infanticide and forced widowhood, child marriages, untouchability, *purdah*, *devadāsī*, the caste-system and prohibition of foreign travel began to lose their tyrannical hold on the minds of Hindus. And reformers arose who were determined to purge the society of these evils.'²

It should be noted, however, that the Western impact on India is not a cultural one only. It is also a religious one. It may be questioned whether a cultural influence alone would have been able to

¹ H. Kraemer: *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, 15.

² D. S. Sarma: *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, 68.

effect these changes and reforms. As a matter of fact many of these evils mentioned by Professor Sarma existed in the Graeco-Roman world at the beginning of our era, in spite of the very high culture of these peoples. These evils were removed only by the impact of the Christian faith. This may be the case also in the Indian transformation.

Definitely distinct from Western culture, yet indissolubly intertwined with it, are certain elements of the Christian faith. In fact, Christianity is one of the parents of this culture, the other one being the ancient Graeco-Roman civilization. As the father died before the child was born, the care of it became the duty of the mother. Western culture was reared in the Christian faith, and the mother put her mark on the child in almost all spheres of life—education, law, art, philosophy, morality. As a grown-up the child has become emancipated from its mother, but, though it sadly denies her, it cannot get rid of her blood in its veins or delete entirely the traces of her fostering efforts. Wheresoever Western culture goes, therefore, there will also be some influence of the Christian faith.

The Christian influence on modern Hinduism, however, is not limited to that which comes through the channel of Western culture. Closely related though they be, they are two different entities. The Christian faith has a life of its own, and this life is very vigorous and active. Nothing can better refute the allegation that the Christian faith has outlived itself than the fact that it is so vigorously expanding in the world. Western culture may have come near to its end, but there is no sign that the Christian faith is declining. Through its mission work during the last hundred years it has made considerable impacts on the life of non-Christian peoples in all parts of the world, and especially so in India. Its influence on Hinduism has never been greater than it is today.

How has Hinduism reacted to this inrush of Western culture and Christian religion? At first, according to D. S. Sarma, 'the Indian mind was thrown off its balance'.¹ 'These two forces acting in combination produced in the minds of the educated classes for a time either a thoroughgoing scepticism or a partial leaning towards Christianity.' But 'ultimately it served only to rouse Hinduism from its sleep.'²

There has taken place a remarkable renaissance of Hinduism. It

¹ D. S. Sarma: *op. cit.*, 68.

² *Ib.*, 69.

is purging itself of old evil customs and practices, adopting new ideas and ideals, thereby adapting itself to the demands of the new day that has dawned on India. This modern Hinduism, of course, is not accepted by orthodox Hindus, but it is gaining strength and new ground every day. From Ram Mohan Roy, the father of modern Hinduism, up to the present day, this process has been going on, producing a number of outstanding personalities. Men like Tagore and Gandhi can be understood only against the background of this renascent Hinduism. Conversely, they themselves have made most remarkable contributions to the furtherance of modern Hinduism. Here we are going to study one of them from a special point of view.

The task of this investigation is that of analysing the religion of Rabindranath Tagore from a Christian point of view. I shall attempt to place his religious ideas in the searchlight of the Gospel. In other words, I intend to use the Gospel as a standard measure by means of which I shall attempt an evaluation of the religion of Tagore. As a Christian I accept the statement of the Tambaram Conference: 'We believe that all religious insight and experience have to be fully tested before God in Christ.'¹

Our Hindu friends, probably, will question the ability of a non-Hindu to understand the religion of Tagore. Especially when a writer strikes a critical note he is almost sure to meet with the contention that an outsider cannot have a right understanding of the matter. A religion can be understood, it is argued, only by those who live in it. This argument, however, seems to contain a considerable overstatement. Through a careful and sympathetic study any religion can be fairly well grasped and described also by an outsider. The science of comparative religion gives sufficient evidence of this. What is needed, in addition to the necessary scientific qualifications, is only a mind open to spiritual things, a sympathetic attitude, and respect for truth.

Yet there may be another, more serious, objection to my undertaking. It may be argued that the method adopted is a very unscientific one, and that a piece of a research of this kind will necessarily be of a very subjective character. Science must be unprejudiced, unbiassed and free from any preconception—otherwise it is no science. Therefore, it is concluded, if a man takes his standpoint in a certain religion, from which he attempts an estimate of other religious

¹ *Tambaram Series*, vol. I, 211.

systems, he necessarily must relinquish, for his investigation, the claim of being scientific. But this is a rash conclusion. There is no harm in measuring a piece of cloth or other stuff by means of a metre, or a yard, or a *kejam* or any other standard measure, provided only that you state clearly what kind of standard measure you have employed. Similarly, there can be nothing unscientific in testing the religion of Tagore, or any other religion, in the light of the Gospel.

It will immediately be admitted that the *choice* of standard is not a matter of science, it is a matter of faith. A choice of standard that could be scientifically accounted for would require a standard outside or above all existing religions. Science, so far, has not been able to produce or discover such a standard. Whether it can be discovered in the future is doubtful.

I am aware that, on this point, opinion differs widely. There are those who hold a relativistic view of all religious knowledge, saying that all human knowledge of God is so fragmentary and inadequate that it matters very little if one believes this or that. All religions contain some truth, therefore they are equally good. Some go to the extent of saying that God is unknowable, He is *neti, neti*, 'not this, not that'. This comes to saying that all religions are equally false. On the other hand, there are those who contend that there must be a criterion for religious truth as well as for all truth; consequently there must be some kind of objective standard by which we can measure the truth of a special religion. They would say with C. C. J. Webb that we may test a religion by its success in encouraging, and being itself encouraged by, moral and intellectual progress among its votaries, or that the only true test of the rank of one religion as compared with another is to be sought in the greater or less extent to which it exhibits the specific nature of religion, and not that of science or morality as distinguished from religion.¹

My position should not be mistaken for the first one mentioned above. I am firmly convinced that it is possible to obtain essential knowledge of God, because He reveals Himself to us. If that be so, all religions, with their conflicting and contradictory views and teachings, cannot be equal—such a statement, in my opinion, reveals that the question of truth, after all, is not taken seriously.

On the other hand, I do not find myself in a position to accept fully the second standpoint either. I would willingly admit that the

¹ C. C. J. Webb: *God and Personality*, 245.

extent to which a religion encourages, and is being encouraged by, moral and intellectual progress among its votaries, may, in a way, serve as a testimony to its truth. But it must not be overlooked that neither intellectual nor moral progress is an unfailing indication of religious values. Religious truth must be judged according to its capacity of satisfying the fundamental *religious* needs of man. In other words, only a genuinely religious standard can be accepted.

In that respect the second statement of C. C. J. Webb is more to the point. A religion may be judged according to its success in exhibiting the specific nature of religion. But what is this nature? So far, it has not been possible to find a universally accepted definition of religion.¹

This being so, we are at a loss to find a scientifically acceptable standard against which a religion could be measured.

This fact is not surprising if we consider the nature of religious knowledge. Baron von Hügel, in one of his essays, has a very fine passage about our knowledge of religious realities: we get to know such realities slowly, laboriously, intermittently, partially; we get to know them not inevitably, not altogether apart from our dispositions, but only if we are sufficiently awake to care for knowing them, sufficiently humble to welcome them, and sufficiently generous to pay continuously the price which is strictly necessary if this knowledge and love are not to shrink but to grow.²

¹ The philosophers and theologians of the 'Enlightenment' in the eighteenth century found it in the belief in God, duty and immortality. Schleiermacher, the theologian of Romanticism, defined it as 'the feeling of absolute dependence' (*Christian Faith*). Harald Höffding (*Philosophy of Religion*) tried, by analogy with the physical theory of the indestructibility of energy, to define it as the belief in the indestructibility of value. Nathan Söderblom, from his comprehensive studies in the realm of comparative religion, defined it as respect for the Holy. In the two last cases it is easy to see that the definitions are more concerned about the form than about the content of religion, as it is left an open question what values should be preserved, or what should be respected as holy. This is still more the case with A. Nygren's definition (*Religiöst Apriori*) of the category of religion as the category of eternity. Nygren is concerned only about the transcendental category (in Kant's sense) of religion, which is pure form, and does not say anything about the content of religion.

These are only a few of the more commonly known definitions of the nature of religion; there are many more. None has been universally accepted.

² *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion*, 104.

The world of religion is a world of values, a world of infinitely subtle and intimately personal relations, and it is impossible to gather under one unitary conception this rich variety of complex connections.¹

To adhere to a religion or to accept a faith is to adhere to a certain view of life and of the world, and this is not merely an intellectual acceptance, but a moral *choice* and a *decision*, in which the whole of my personality is involved.

This is, in the highest degree, the case with the Christian faith. It is a wholly personal relationship. I am a Christian, not because of any scientific proof of Christianity's truth, but because I have met Christ and responded to His call and in my heart been convinced, through His Holy Spirit, of His truth. Christ, therefore, as I have said, is my standard. I am sure that human reason can go a long way to proving the truth of the Christian religion, but ultimately this rests on personal conviction, on a response to a call, on a wholly personal relationship.

This being so, I can see no other strictly defensible method of estimating the value of a certain religion than the one here adopted. I am, therefore, not going to argue with Tagore from a philosophical point of view about his religion. I can only place it alongside the Biblical faith and try to show in what respects it, from that point of view, falls short of reflecting religious truth.

There are, however, other difficulties which an investigation into the religion of Tagore will meet with. As his writings, for the most part, were originally in his mother-tongue, much of their beauty will be lost to one who does not know Bengali. If we had to investigate his works from an aesthetical point of view, the lack of knowledge of Bengali would be a fatal handicap. But as we are here concerned only with the religious and philosophical ideas laid down in his literary production, it is only a minor obstacle.

For our purpose the English translations available will suffice. Fortunately no small portion of his production was translated into English by the poet himself, and even though, probably, much of its poetical beauty was lost thereby, its ideological content has been fully preserved.

A greater difficulty is this poetical form in which his philosophy

¹ Cf. D. G. Moses: 'The Problem of Truth in Religion' (*Tambaram Series*, vol. I, 80).

is clad. Tagore was much more a poet than a philosopher, and consequently he expressed his ideas not so much in clear-cut theses and systematic discourses as in lyrical poems. Even his philosophical essays and lectures carry this stamp of poetry. 'His philosophy is unsystematic, in the sense that it is laden with poetry; in fact, it is more a poet's creed than a rational statement', says Prof. D. P. Mukerji.¹

Tagore himself was not unconscious of this fact. 'I hope', he says, in *The Religion of Man*,² 'that my readers have understood, as they have read these pages, that I am neither a scholar nor a philosopher. They should not expect from me fruits gathered from a wide field of studies or wealth brought by a mind trained in the difficult explanations of knowledge.' He called his religion 'a poet's religion'.³ 'I am a singer myself, and I am ever attracted by the strains that come from the House of Songs',⁴ he says. But his poetry by no means easily lays itself open to philosophical analysis. Its relation to philosophy is described by the poet himself as follows: 'Does one write poetry to explain any matter? Something felt within the heart tries to find outside shape as a poem. . . . That words have meanings is just the difficulty. That is why the poet has to turn and twist them in metre and verse, so that the meaning may be held somewhat in check, and the feeling allowed a chance to express itself. . . . This utterance of feeling is not the statement of a fundamental truth, or a scientific fact, or a useful moral precept. Like a tear or a smile a poem is but a picture of what is taking place within. If Science or Philosophy may gain anything from it, they are welcome, but that is not the reason of its being. If while crossing a ferry you can catch a fish, you are a lucky man, but that does not make the ferry-boat a fishing-boat, nor should you abuse the ferryman if he does not make fishing his business.'⁵

It may seem an almost hopeless endeavour to attempt a systematic analysis of material of this kind. Yet it is not so hopeless as it may seem at first sight. For, as Prof. Mukerji points out, we must not 'exhaust Tagore by calling him a poet'. There is 'more in Tagore's poetry than mere poetry, more in that poetry than mere lyricism'.⁶ Tagore was also able to express himself in philosophical

¹ D. P. Mukerji: *Tagore, a Study*, 75. Cf. V. Prakasanathan: *Tagore, Prophet of a New Vision*, 14; S. Radhakrishnan: *The Philosophy of Tagore*, 6.

² 90; cf. *ib.* 88.

³ *Ib.*, 107.

⁴ *Ib.*, 88.

⁵ *Reminiscences*, 222 f.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, 84.

language, although he hesitated to call himself a philosopher¹. It is fortunate that he himself has explained his philosophical and religious ideas in thoughtful discourses and essays. For our purpose we shall avail ourselves of these writings of his, using them as a guide in the religion which has found its finest expression in his poetry.

A word must be said also about another difficulty: the application of my standard. If the Gospel is to be used as such a standard, it needs, it may be argued, an authoritative interpretation, or, in other words, a universally accepted theology. My opponent will have an easy task in pointing out the great variety of conflicting doctrines and theologies in the Christian Church; he may scornfully ask: Are you going to adopt a Roman or an Anglican, a Lutheran or a Presbyterian, a Methodist or any other theology for your purpose? The question is relevant, but there is an answer to it.

Firstly, I accept, as I think every serious and sincere Christian will do, the New Testament as the fundamental and normative interpretation of the person and life and work of Christ.

Secondly, the divisions of the Christian Church, though they are many and humiliating, cannot alter the fact that there is an inner unity of the Church, much stronger than the unity of Hinduism—if indeed Hinduism has any real unity at all, which may be questioned.

If we study the great variety of Christian confessions, we will find that, in spite of many conflicting doctrines regarding other things, they all, with one voice, confess their faith in Jesus Christ as the divine Saviour from sin and evil. Here is the heart of the Christian faith. St. Ignatius, on his way to Rome, where he was to be thrown to the wild beasts, gave a classic expression of it in his letter to the Christians at Philadelphia. 'The Gospel', he wrote, 'contains something that stands out: the coming of the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, His suffering, and the Resurrection.' In these three things, the Incarnation, the Cross and the Resurrection of our Lord, St. Ignatius had found the 'pre-eminence' of the Gospel. The Church, in spite of many conflicts, has always unanimously held a firm grasp of these three things as the central facts of the Gospel, and any unprejudiced reading of the New Testament will admit that the testimony of the New Testament and the experience of the Church corroborate each other in this.

I am not going to adopt any special theology for my present

¹ *The Religion of Man*. 129.

purpose, but I intend to use the centre of the Gospel as a torch, in the light of which I shall place the subject-matter of my investigation.

That we have undertaken an analysis of the religion of Tagore needs no explanation. He was a poet of world-wide reputation and influence, well deserving that all aspects of his vast output should be studied. It may be true that his greatness has been overestimated. We need not concern ourselves with the verdict of Beverley Nichols, who thinks that Tagore 'was merely a charming minor poet, who owed more than he cared to admit to Yeats'.¹ But it does seem necessary to conclude with A. Aronson that much of his fame in the West was due to the very fact that he was a poet from the East.² In the eyes of the West the essence of all things Eastern is some kind of super-personal and undefinable mystery. Therefore Tagore was easily elevated to the level of a seer. There was, in the beginning of this century, a spontaneous reaction in the West against the rationalism and materialism of the nineteenth century, and a longing for a deeper understanding of life, giving more room to feeling and intuition. Tagore was received with expectations of a rejuvenated mysticism from the East. Also, many Christians were delighted because they believed his message to be identical with the teachings of the Christian Church. On the other hand, it must also be taken into account that vast masses of Western people had turned their backs upon the Christian faith and exchanged genuinely religious faith for a vague idealism or a dim cult of Nature. They took to Tagore because he appealed to their vague and aimless religious longing.³ And many enthusiastic, sometimes almost ecstatic, expressions of admiration, as Aronson points out,⁴ were symptomatic of an emotional ambiguity and a general loss of standards in post-war Europe. Also political aims, as well as the *réclame* of publishers, helped in raising his fame. But, on the other hand, all these things did much harm to a proper appreciation of his work and message. It is no wonder, therefore, that the enthusiasm gradually subsided. A sounder criticism and a truer estimate of his work would be able to lay a more solid foundation for his fame. And the world may yet bitterly regret that it did not take more seriously his

¹ Beverley Nichols: *Verdict on India*, 117 f.

² A. Aronson: *Rabindranath through Western Eyes*, 14.

³ *Ib.*, 81.

⁴ *Ib.*, 83.

entreating appeal for the cultivation of personal and spiritual values instead of material ones.

It is true, as D. S. Sarma has pointed out, that Tagore 'has not given us any work which we can place by the side of *The Divine Comedy* or *Paradise Lost*, and that, in exchange for one great religious epic of the quality of *The Divine Comedy*, 'we could have gladly given all his novels, dramas, pictures and more than half of his poems'.¹ Sarma may be right in his opinion that 'consequently he cannot take the first rank, and can be placed only in the second rank among the world-poets'.

Yet he was a poet of universal reputation, as a religious poet perhaps the greatest of our time, and his religious ideas gained a world-wide influence. Therefore they cannot be exempted from a critical examination. Especially in India, where Tagore is still held in the greatest esteem, there seems to be an imperative need of making clear what his religious message really was. Tagore, in the opinion of many, is a typical exponent of modern Hinduism, the purged and renewed Hinduism of the religious renaissance in modern India.² This may be true: the greater then is the need of a critical analysis of his message. Such an investigation, accordingly, should be able to shed some light also on present-day Hinduism in general.

¹ D. S. Sarma: *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, 383.

² *Ib.*, *passim*. Cf. C. F. Andrews: 'Tagore and the Renaissance in Bengal', *Contemporary Review*, 1913, 809-817; Masti Venkatesa Iyengar: *Rabindranath Tagore*, 252.

I

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES ON TAGORE

Before we enter upon our proper task of analysing the religion of Tagore, it may be expedient to acquaint ourselves with the influences which may have been formative of his religion.

Was Tagore a Christian? There has been much discussion on this point, and scholars differ widely in their opinion regarding this question. We have already mentioned that, when Tagore first became known in the West, many identified his poetry and message with the teaching of the Christian Church, or at any rate with religious views and philosophies prevalent in the West. 'Sir Rabindranath Tagore is not a poet who brings us news from the East but one who returns to us what we have already lent', wrote an English publicist.¹ Although he did not confess himself a Christian, his religion, in many quarters, was regarded as a fruit of the Christian mission in India.²

Typical of such views is an article by K. J. Saunders: '*Gitanjali*. An Appreciation and an Attempt at Interpretation'.³ 'Some solemn music in a great cathedral,' the writer says, 'a sunset, or some word of a friend in our hour of darkness—these belong to the ineffable and sublime in us, and it is to this that *Gitanjali* makes its appeal.'⁴ This can be said, but it must also be admitted that there is very little that is exclusively Christian in these things. The writer, however, continues: 'I would venture further, and say that in many of us it will stir still deeper depths of feeling—depths that we associate with the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, when we realize that the Master of the Feast is in our midst and our hearts go out to Him in wonder and love and awe. For the great Lover of whom our poet sings is to me none other than Jesus Christ.'⁵

This is obviously an overstatement. To the present writer it seems almost incredible that one who really knows the Christian religion and the religion of Tagore could write like this. The same is the case with another statement in the same article: 'For the subconscious

¹ Quoted by Aronson: *op. cit.*, 19.

² Friedrich Heiler: *Christlicher Glaube und Indisches Geistesleben*, 35.

³ *The International Review of Missions*, vol. III, no. 9, 149 f.

^{4,5} *Ib.*, 149.

mind of India is becoming more and more Christian, in the sense that it is tending more and more to bow down to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹ That the subconscious mind of India is being changed is certainly true, and, without any doubt, the Christian culture plays an important role in this process. Yet it is more than doubtful whether it is 'tending more and more to bow down to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Certain ethical and social elements of the Gospel have been accepted by modern Hinduism, but of the central truth of Christianity it has little understanding.

Like K. J. Saunders, Friedrich Heiler is of the opinion that 'the achievement of Tagore's life is a fruit of the Christian mission'.² 'When we consider all the strong influences of the Christian faith, hope and love in Tagore's philosophy, we must admit: Tagore is an unbaptized Christian', says Heiler.³ In Heiler's opinion Tagore 'has grasped the innermost nature of the Christian mission. He is, therefore, not only a wonderful witness to the advance of Christianity in India, he has also a message to Western Christendom and to the Christian mission.'⁴

A much more balanced standpoint is taken by E. J. Thompson in his works on Tagore.⁵ He too is quite sure that Christian influence is traceable in Tagore's works. 'What is best in *Gitanjali* is an anthology from the ages of Indian thought and brooding; but it is the sun of Christian influence that has brought these buds into flower.'⁶ He even adds that in Tagore there 'was given a glimpse of what the Christianity of India will be like, and we see that it will be something better than the Christianity which came to it.'⁷ But, on the other hand, he states very definitely that Tagore was no Christian. 'Only sheer ignorance of him and of Christianity could claim him as a Christian.'⁸ To call him a Christian 'is equal nonsense with saying that his attitude represented ordinary Hinduism. In my judgement, the direct influence of Christianity on his thought has been very little. . . . I am sure that the sterner side of Christian doctrine has made no appeal to Rabindranath.'⁹

If we turn to Indian writers on Tagore we find a general bias

¹ *Ib.*, 154.

²⁻³ Friedrich Heiler, *op. cit.*, 35.

⁴ *Ib.*, 37.

⁵ *Rabindranath Tagore, his Life and Work*, Calcutta, 1921; *Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Dramatist*, 2nd ed. 1930; see also *Quarterly Review*, Oct. 1914.

⁶⁻⁸ *Rabindranath Tagore, his Life and Work*, 100. Prof. Radhakrishnan, in his *The Philosophy of Tagore*, 6, gives a very inadequate and misleading report of Thompson's view on this point.

towards the opinion that Tagore had nothing to thank Christianity for but owed all his religious ideas to Hinduism. 'The work of Rabindranath is essentially Indian in sentiment and form', Dr. Coomaraswami said.¹ Prof. D. S. Sarma in his study of Tagore comes to the conclusion: 'Thus does Tagore, both in his mystical poetry and in his philosophical writings, reiterate and emphasize the immemorial teachings of the Hindu scriptures.'² And Dr. S. Radhakrishnan is of the opinion 'that in his *Sādhana* and other works Rabindranath, by his power of imagination, has breathed life into the dry bones of the ancient philosophy of India and made it live. His teaching is in no sense a mere borrowed product of Christianity; indeed, it goes deeper in certain fundamental aspects than Christianity as represented to us in the West.'³

It should be readily admitted that Tagore's teaching is by no means a 'mere' borrowed product of Christianity. Tagore's genius was too great and rich to be in need of merely borrowing anything from whatever quarter it might be. On the other hand, it may be questioned whether 'his power of imagination' was the only means by the help of which he was able to breathe life into 'the dry bones of the ancient philosophy of India'. There might have been forces coming from other quarters that helped him in this work. One also regrets that Dr. Radhakrishnan does not by a single word indicate in which 'fundamental aspects' the teaching of Tagore goes deeper than Christianity.

It may seem strange and regrettable, indeed, that learned scholars and sincere religious writers differ so widely on the same problem. What is the cause of such glaring differences? Partly it may be due to the unconscious influence of wishful thinking on scholarly work. Those who take an interest in mission work wish to find evidences for its success, and those who dislike it are unwilling to admit any loan from the Christian faith.

But this is not the only reason. Partly the differences may be due to a difference in the conception of influence. To some it seems to mean a direct contact with the Bible and the Christian faith, resulting in wholesale Christian views and doctrines, whereas others seem to be content with an indirect contact and more vague and indefinite reminiscences of Christianity. Whether the result in this

¹ Quoted by S. Radhakrishnan: *The Philosophy of Tagore*, 3.

² D. S. Sarma: *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, 402.

³ S. Radhakrishnan: *op. cit.*, 119.

case can be termed Christian seems doubtful, but naturally we have the right to speak of an influence, even if its results are not demonstrable in the form of genuinely Christian ideas or doctrines. They may have had other effects. It may well be that ideas and ideals and other religious elements are taken over only in a mutilated or in a transmuted form. Yet they may exercise a considerable influence in the way that they expel, or change, or remove to the background some traditional ideas and beliefs, which otherwise would have occupied a central position, and thus clear the way for other ideas, which otherwise would have had little room. A simile which Tagore himself used in other contexts may serve as an illustration of this. If a planet is observed to make movements in its orbit which cannot be accounted for by known facts, it may be assumed that its gravitation is influenced by some unknown celestial body causing these deviations from the normal course of the planet. As a matter of fact, some minor planets have been discovered on this hypothesis. A similar law of gravitation can be found also in the realm of spirit, says Tagore.¹ This may hold true also in his own case. It may well be that 'the work of Rabindranath is essentially Indian in sentiment and form'. But if a careful analysis proves that there are considerable omissions and changes in his religion as compared with traditional Hinduism, it seems reasonable to assume that such deviations from his ancestral faith are caused by the influences of some forces outside Hinduism. Such influences need by no means be direct, not even conscious to himself.

This is the reason why we cannot settle the dispute simply by referring it to the judgement of Tagore himself. There can be no doubt that Tagore considered himself a true heir of his ancestral Hindu faith. 'The writer', he says, in his introduction to *Sādhanā*, 'has been brought up in a family where texts of the Upanishads are used in daily worship; and he has had before him the example of his father, who lived his long life in the closest communion with God, while not neglecting his duties to the world, or allowing his keen interest in all human affairs to suffer any abatement. So in these papers, it may be hoped, Western readers will have an opportunity of coming into touch with the ancient spirit of India as revealed in our sacred texts and manifested in the life today.'²

It would seem that this statement—and there are many like it in

¹ *Creative Unity*, 72; *Man*, 19.

² *Sādhanā*, p. vii.

Tagore's writings—should settle the dispute definitely. Yet the question of the provenance of religious and philosophical ideas is not so easily solved. In the spiritual world there is a kind of osmose through which views and ideas blend themselves in a way which does not always lay itself open to immediate observation. It is by no means certain that a poet or a philosopher or a writer himself is quite conscious of all the different sources which his own piety and thought have drawn upon. Much may have come to him from sources and along avenues which are partly or totally concealed from himself. This probably holds true also in regard to Tagore. He was first and foremost a poet, concerned much less with analysis than with synthesis. Of this he himself was aware. He says: 'The detailed facts of history, which are the battleground of the learned, are not my province.'¹ The real provenance of his religion and philosophy can be settled only by a careful study and analysis of their content and character.

It may be helpful, however, to trace the various roads on which influences from different quarters may have reached him.

There can be no question as to what was the first source of religious influence upon him: it was the religion of his paternal home. We have already quoted a significant passage in his writings indicating the great importance he himself attributed to the example of his father and the influence of the Upanishads which were used in the daily worship in his home.² His father Devendranath, in his *Autobiography*, has described how deeply impressed he was when he first became acquainted with the Upanishads. It was only by chance that he came across a stray leaf of the *Ishā-Upanishad*. Hitherto he had been under the impression that all the *sāstras* were full of idolatry and that it therefore was impossible to extract any really religious truth from them. But here he found what his heart had been longing for: 'Nectar from paradise came upon me.'³ Henceforth the Upanishads became the daily nourishment of his spiritual life. At his side Rabindranath learnt the use of these texts even as a small boy.⁴ Later, as a member of Brāhma Samāj, of which his father was the leader, he had further opportunity of acquainting himself with them.

This love for the Upanishads continued throughout his life. The quotation just referred to continues a few lines below: 'To me the verses of the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha have ever

¹ *The Religion of Man*, 88.

² Devendranath Tagore: *Autobiography*, 58.

³ See above, p. 14.

⁴ *Reminiscences*, 94.

been things of the spirit, and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth; and I have used them, both in my own life and in my preaching, as being instinct with individual meaning for me, as for others, and awaiting for their confirmation, my own special testimony, which must have its value because of its individuality.¹ This statement of his is amply corroborated by the testimony of his immediate companions² as well as by his own philosophical and religious essays and discourses, in which he gives a wealth of quotations from the Upanishads; their direct and indirect influence is clearly visible also in a large number of his poems and dramas.

It should be noticed, however, that he did not accept the Upanishadic philosophy wholesale. Much of it is silently left out. The doctrines of *karma* and *samsāra*, the transmigration of souls, which are found in the Upanishads, had no room in Tagore's philosophy; nor had the *māyā*-doctrine, according to which the visible world is unreal. Not even the central thought of the Upanishads, the *tattvam asi* idea, the absolute identification of God and the individual soul, agreed fully with Tagore's philosophy of life. He refused to read the Upanishads in the light of the monistic interpretation given to them by Sankaracharya. From his father and the Brāhma Samāj he had inherited a theistic faith, which was by no means compatible with the *advaita*-philosophy of the Vedāntist. Devendranath says in his *Autobiography*: 'Our relation with God is that of a worshipper and worshipped—this the very essence of Brahmanism.'³ When we found the opposite conclusion to be arrived at in Sankaracharya's *Śārīrak mīmāṃsā* of the *Vedānta Darśana*, we could no longer place any confidence in it; nor could we accept it as a support of our religion.⁴

Rabindranath himself took a similar attitude. Having described, in *The Religion of Man*, the philosophy of 'the four stages of life', with its ultimate goal of 'the perfect liberation of the individual in the universal spirit across the furthest limits of humanity itself',⁵ he adds: 'But such an ideal of the utter extinction of the individual separateness has not a universal sanction in India. There are many of us whose prayer is for dualism, so that for them the bond of devotion with God may continue for ever. For them religion is a

¹ *Sādhana*, p. viii.

² Mukerji: *Tagore*, 77.

³ Brahmanism—the faith of the Brāhma Samāj.

⁴ Devendranath Tagore: *Autobiography*, 160 f.

⁵ *The Religion of Man*, 191.

truth which is ultimate, and they refuse to envy those who are ready to sail for the further shore of existence across humanity.¹

There are, however, not only omissions in Tagore's interpretation of the Upanishads. There are also additions. Even a surface study of his religious discourses will reveal that he more than once refers to the Upanishads for support of views and ideas which are not to be found there. We shall give just one typical instance as an illustration. A central element in Tagore's conception of God is love. As Ernest Rhys has noticed,² he converts the Upanishadic *ānandam*, joy, into love, and writes: '*Advaitam* is *ānandam*—the One is Love.³ The Upanishadic statement: 'From joy does spring all this creation', Tagore interprets as: 'It is his love that creates.'⁴

There can be no doubt that Tagore, in this way, reads into the Upanishads an idea which is not to be found there, but is borrowed from other quarters. This addition seems to be deliberate and is quite in accordance with his principle of interpretation. In his opinion, religious texts, like the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha, are 'endowed with boundless vital *growth*'.⁵ Such 'growth' of the texts takes place through the explanations given to them 'by the commentaries of individual lives'. Through such commentaries, says Tagore, 'they gain an added mystery'. Tagore pours much scorn on the learned investigations into the religious scriptures of India by Western scholars, who exhibit them 'in labelled cases—mummied specimens of human thought and aspiration, preserved for all time in the wrappings of erudition'.⁷ 'The men who are cursed with the gift of the literal mind are the unfortunate ones who are always busy with their nets and neglect the fishing.'⁸

We readily admit that these scriptures 'are of living importance', and that, as Tagore maintains, 'the meaning of the living words that come out of the experiences of great hearts can never be exhausted by any one system of logical interpretation'.⁹ There is, however, in Tagore's way of quoting the Scriptures, the danger of neglecting the simple demand of truth that everything—including the sayings of the Scriptures—must be taken for what it is. If, in a pedantic interpretation, there is the danger of killing the spirit by the letter, there is, on the other hand, in a too free interpretation, the danger of neglecting the simple, fundamental demand for sincerity. Especially

¹ *Ib.*, 202.

² Ernest Rhys: *Rabindranath Tagore*, 132.

³ *Creative Unity*, p. vi.

⁴ *Sādhana*, 78 f.

⁵⁻⁷ *Sādhana*, p. viii.

⁸ *Ib.*, 72.

⁹ *Ib.*, p. viii.

in India is this danger very real. Not seldom a saying is readily made to support an idea which is quite alien to it, whereas, on the other hand, a statement, or a fact, is often too easily explained away by means of a symbolical interpretation or in other ways.¹ Over against such tendencies the necessity of scholarly sincerity without deadening pedantry must be stressed.

Tagore, unquestionably, has learnt from many different masters, and drawn upon many various sources, the influences of which have balanced and modified each other. One such source, modifying the philosophy of the Upanishads, was the religion of Vaishnavism, with its emphasis on *bhakti*, the attachment in devotion and obedience to a personal God. Bengal can boast of a remarkable Vaishnavite tradition. The religious revival which was initiated in South India through the great Vaishnavite philosopher Rāmānuja, as a revolt against the dry and sterile intellectualism of the Vedānta philosophy, was brought to North India by Rāmānanda in the fifteenth century. The piety of Rāmānanda and his followers was characterized by its devotion to Vishnu in his *avatār*, 'incarnation', of Rāma. The songs and poems of Chaitanya in the fifteenth century, and Tulasidās in the sixteenth century, are filled to the brim with love for Rāma.

It was not, however, the *avatār*-philosophy of the Vaishnava-tradition that appealed to Tagore. Here also we can trace the influence of his father. For, in Devendranath's creed, the *Avatārvāda*, like the *Advaitavāda* and the *Māyāvāda* doctrines, had no place.² Also in Rabindranath's essays and discourses the *avatār*-doctrine is

¹ A classical example of such interpretation is in Swāmi Dayānanda's interpretation of the Vedas, an admittedly extreme case of text-torturing. Professor Sarma, however, defends it, demanding for the canon the right of being 'liberally interpreted' (*The Renaissance of Hinduism*, 636). If by this 'liberal interpretation' is meant only that the spirit should never be 'sacrificed to the letter' (*ib.*), no man of sound judgment could have any objection against it. But it seems that, to Professor Sarma, it means more than that. With a reference to the belief that 'there is a deep mysticism behind the complex symbolism of the Vedas' (*op. cit.*, 180 f.), he defends Swāmi Dayānanda's way of interpretation as permissible. Even if it be conceded that the belief in the mysticism of the Vedas is true, this does not entitle us to read into the old hymns ready-made doctrines fetched from other quarters, not to speak of all kinds of modern sciences. With one who takes such an attitude it is useless to argue, for anything like firm ground is missing.

² Devendranath Tagore: *Autobiography*, 175.

absent. The humanist divinity of Krishna or Rāma could not appeal to him.¹

In Rāmānanda's religion, however, other strands also were to be found. He lived at a time in which the passionate poetry and philosophy of Persian mystics like Jalāluddīn Rūmī and Hāfiz were exercising a powerful influence on religious thought in India.² This Muhammedan mysticism had made a deep impression upon the soul of Rāmānanda. Sufism and Hinduism were welded into one in his mind.

This kind of piety is especially visible in his great disciple Kabīr, a poor weaver and poet in Banaras. Although of Muslim ancestry, he had become a devoted disciple of this Hindu *guru*, whose syncretistic piety he made his own. He was, in his own words, 'at once the child of Allah and of Rām'.³ In order to express his own overwhelming experience of the Divine Reality he employed a wealth of symbols and ideas drawn from very different and even conflicting philosophies and faiths. 'So thoroughgoing is Kabīr eclecticism', says Evelyn Underhill,⁴ 'that he seems by turns Vedāntist and Vaishnavite, Pantheist and Transcendentalist, Brāhman and Sūfī'. To him God is the omnipresent Reality, the 'All-pervading'. He is even 'the pure Being', 'beyond both the limited and the limitless'.⁵ In such utterances Kabīr comes near to the abstract philosophy of Vedāntism. But he escapes from the pitfall of pure monism by his strong emphasis on the personal aspect of God. Brāhma and the creature are ever united, yet they are ever distinct. Their union is a love-union, a mutual indwelling. The relation between God and the soul is a mysterious union-in-separateness relation. God is the supreme object of love. Kabīr makes use of a vast number of different symbols in order to illustrate this relation: God is the soul's comrade, teacher and bridegroom, the lover and the beloved. Love and joy are the dominant notes in Kabīr's poetry. Love is at the root of the universe, it is the common factor which unites the finite and the infinite worlds. Love is 'the form of God'. All is soaked in love. The whole of creation is the play of the eternal Lover, it is a love-game in rhythmic and harmonious music.⁶ Kabīr was as passionate a musician as he was a poet; to him the universe was full of music, music 'made

¹ Mukerji: *Tagore*, 79.

² *One Hundred Poems of Kabīr*, p. vii.

³ *Ib.*, p. ix.

⁴ *Ib.*, p. xxxvii.

⁵ *Ib.*, no. 7.

⁶ *Ib.*, pp. xxx f.

without fingers and without strings'.¹ It is the melody of love that swells forth.²

The emphasis on love at the heart of the universe reminds us of the New Testament's teaching of God as love,³ and the question has been raised whether Kabīr had received any Christian influence. As in the case of Tagore, scholars differ widely on this point,⁴ some finding a deep Christian influence in his piety and poetry, others definitely denying any such influence.

There are many passages in the verses of Kabīr which have their parallels in the Bible.⁵ Two things must be borne in mind concerning such parallels. On the one hand, it should be noted that even if none of these parallels is of such a character as to compel us to say that it *must* have been borrowed, the cumulative effect of a large number of them seems to carry some weight. On the other hand, we must remember that their existence does not make their author a Christian, for, if he has inserted them in a context quite alien to the Christian faith, he has thereby changed their spirit and meaning.

Even a surface study of the hundred poems of Kabīr which Tagore translated into English will make it clear that nothing in Kabīr's piety was genuinely Christian. On the other hand, it seems very difficult to explain certain features and strands in his poetry with the help of Hindu and Muhammedan sources only. Especially is his emphasis on God's love found nowhere in purely Hindu or Muslim scriptures. Certainly, it is found in some Sūfī mystics, like Hāfiz and Jalāluddīn Rūmī. But Sufism is not purely Muslim religion. Admittedly this Persian mysticism is strongly influenced by Christian thought and life. The divine love is an outstanding theme in the poetry of Sufism.⁶ There can be little doubt that this is due to influence from Christian teaching, the central doctrine of which is that of God's love. One who knew both the Muslim and the Christian faith well, Professor R. Siraj ud-Din, of Lahore,⁷ said of Jalāluddīn Rūmī: 'What he strives to draw out from the Koran by

¹ *Ib.*, no. 17.

² *Ib.*, pp. xxx f.

³ *Ib.*, p. vii.

⁴ F. E. Keay: *Kabīr and his Followers*, 169. Cf. Underhill, *op. cit.*, p. xxx.

⁵ See Reynold A. Nicholson: 'Sufis' (*Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. xii, p. 16).

⁶ 'The Vital Forces of Christianity and Islam' (*International Review of Missions*, vol. 2, no. 5, pp. 108 ff.). Cf. Fr. Heiler: *Christlicher Glaube und indisches Geistesleben*, 20.

the most indirect and unwarranted ratiocination is the very life and breath of the Christian scriptures.'

Since Jalāluddīn Rūmī and other saints of the Persian mysticism, as we have already pointed out,¹ were, in the time of Rāmānanda and Kabīr, exercising a powerful influence on the religious thought of India, it seems most natural to assume that, through Sūfī mysticism, this Vaishnavism of Bengal has received indirect Christian influence.² There may have been direct influence also. Regarding later Vaishnavism in Bengal, and especially in the case of the followers of Kabīr, direct Christian influence is an indisputable fact.³

That Kabīr and Tagore were kindred souls needs no special proof. Anyone who cares to read the hundred poems of Kabīr, which Tagore has translated, will find how much Tagore resembles Kabīr. A number of symbols and metaphors, ideas and viewpoints in Tagore's poems are found also in Kabīr.⁴ Above all, the devotion to a personal God, and the dominance of joy, love and music are common to both. Yet we have to be careful in making conclusions regarding possible influence. For actually Tagore had formed his religious ideas and laid them down in his poems before he knew of Kabīr. Kshiti Mohan Sen, who made him aware of Kabīr's poetry in 1910, has told me about Tagore's perplexity in finding these close resemblances between Kabīr and himself. 'Alas, I have been copied four hundred years before I was born', he said. But, to a certain extent, Kabīr has influenced Tagore's essays and other writings on religious topics. We must also remember that Kabīr, in a considerable degree, has influenced large sections of Bengal Vaishnavism. His influence cannot be limited to the direct influence of his poems. Through the medium of Bengal Vaishnavism he has had an indirect influence on Tagore as well as on many others.

The careful research by the Rev. Ahmed Shah has shown that only a few of the hundred poems translated by Tagore are genuine Kabīr poems, the majority of them, in all probability, being later products of his followers and some Sūfī poets.⁵ This, however, in no way diminishes, but rather enhances, the possibility of Christian influence on these poems.

¹ See above, p. 19.

² F. E. Keay: *Kabīr and his Followers*, 172 ff.

³ J. N. Farquhar: *The Religious Literature of India*, 331, 333.

⁴ See, e.g., *One Hundred Poems of Kabīr*, nos. 7, 40, 43, 50, 53, 67, 68, 84, 86; and *Gitanjali*, 11, 50; *Fruit-Gathering*, 52, 80; *The Gardener*, 75.

⁵ Keay, *op. cit.*, 62.

Professor Kshiti Mohan Sen has pointed out the similarity between this Vaishnavite piety and that of another Bengal sect, which also has exercised considerable influence on Tagore, the Baüls. His essay, 'The Baül Singers of Bengal',¹ constantly draws parallels between these poets and Kabir. In all probability they draw upon the same sources of inspiration and piety. The Baüls form a peculiar sect, the members of which mostly come from the lower classes of the Hindu and Muslim communities.² 'Baül' means 'madcap', a name given to them because they do not conform to established social usage.³ Many of them have Islamic leanings, and terms used by them reveal the influence of Sufism.⁴ Characteristic of them is the rejection of caste and class-distinctions, their contempt for temples and sacred places, festivals and special deities. The human body is the temple of the Divine; the heart, where God is enshrined, is the holy of holies. 'Sahaj', 'simple', is the term used by them to indicate their way of religion. Their God is 'the Man of the heart'. He is no stranger, for he is human, 'the Supreme Man', sometimes simply called 'the Man'. Their relationship to him is one of mutual love. 'Ever two and ever one, of this the name of Love', is one of their sayings.⁵ This love is a necessity for God as well as for man, for neither can realise himself completely without the other. God needs the love of man. This is the dignity of man.⁶

The Baüls spread their faith by means of simple poems, folk-songs, which they sing in their homes, in the streets and in the market-places. Tagore was convinced that the root of Indian culture was to be found not so much in the great works of poets and philosophers of repute as in the folk-literature, in folk-songs, in legendary mystical cycles, which were composed and recited or sung by rural poet-mystics.⁷ It is no wonder, therefore, that he took great interest in the Baüls.

He knew of them already as a youth, but his attention was drawn to them especially in a time of personal religious struggle, which resulted in his giving up his connection with the Brähma Samāj.⁸ He chanced to hear a song from a beggar belonging to the Baül sect. He thus describes his impression: 'What struck me in this simple song was a religious expression that was neither grossly concrete, full of crude details, nor metaphysical in its rarefied transcendentalism. At

¹ *The Religion of Man*, Appendix, 209 ff.

² *Ib.*, 210.

³ *Ib.*, 209.

⁴ *Ib.*, 217.

⁵ *Creative Unity*, 81.

⁷ D. P. Mukerji: *Tagore*, 80.

⁸ *The Religion of Man*, 110.

the same time it was alive with an emotional sincerity. It spoke of an intense yearning of the heart of the divine which is in Man and not in the temple or scriptures, in images and symbols. The worshipper addresses his songs to Man the ideal.¹

Since then Tagore often tried to meet these people, and at Santiniketan he had a friend and colleague, Prof. Kshiti Mohan Sen, who was eager and able to acquaint him with the literary outcome of this religion.² Often, in his lectures and essays, Tagore referred to the Bāül poets and their songs.³ Evidently they have exercised a great influence upon his religious and philosophical views. What appealed to him was not only the originality of sentiment and diction in their songs,⁴ their unsophisticated theology and their simple way of religious life and worship,⁵ but, above all, their religious conception of man, or, rather, their human conception of God, their doctrine of the humanity of God, their belief in the Divine as the Supreme Man.⁶ In this he had found 'a clue to the inner meaning of all religions'.⁷ The very title of his Hibbert Lectures, *The Religion of Man*, seems to have been inspired by the religious terminology of the Bāüls.

We should not overestimate the similarity between Tagore and the Bāül poets. In him so many other influences—the universalism of the Upanishads, the impact of modern science and Western civilization, etc., were able to modify and transform the simple theology of these village mystics of Bengal. Yet their influence upon him has been considerable, ever since the time he learnt to know them. 'Since then', says Prof. Mukerji, 'his songs and his poems became simpler, less abstract, more direct and human, more social, and more vital.'⁸

Along with the Upanishads, Tagore, in his introduction to *Sādhana*, makes a reference also to 'the teachings of Buddha', which he has used both in his devotional life and in his preaching 'as being instinct with individual meaning'.⁹ From this utterance it would seem as if the teachings of Buddha had played almost as important a role in his spiritual life as have the Upanishads. A careful study of

¹ *The Religion of Man*, 110.

² *Ib.*, 8 and 209 ff.

³ See *Creative Unity*, 69 ff; *The Religion of Man*, 18 and 110 ff., *Reminiscences*, 207; etc.

⁴ *The Religion of Man*, 111.

^{5, 7} *Ib.*, 19.

⁶ *Ib.*, 112 ff.

⁸ D. P. Mukerji: *Tagore*, 82.

⁹ *Sādhana*, p. viii.

his religious ideas, however, will scarcely show this assumption to be true. But, as a matter of fact, there are a number of places in his prose writings, and in his poems as well, where we find references to Buddha.¹ What did Tagore find in the teachings of Buddha that appealed to him?

At first we will be surprised to note that Tagore found a deep similarity between Buddha and the Bāüls. In spite of vast differences in regard to philosophical learning, there is, in the opinion of Tagore, a fundamental unity between Buddha and the Bāüls. 'Both of them', he says, 'believe in a fulfilment which is reached by love's emancipating us from the dominance of self. In both these religions we find man's yearning to attain the infinite worth of his individuality, not through any conventional valuation of society, but through his perfect relationship with Truth. They agree in holding that the realisation of our ultimate object is waiting for us in ourselves.'²

Beginning with the last statement, we must say that the agreement is only a formal one. It is true that the Bāüls, as well as Buddha, find 'that the realisation of our ultimate object is waiting for us in ourselves'. But to the Bāüls this 'ultimate object' means a personal God abiding in our hearts, whereas to Buddha the belief in God is an illusion. The 'ultimate object' according to him is *nirvāna*, a status the definition of which is very difficult; at any rate the union with a personal God is not included in it. Taking the second point of agreement, it is also true that both disregard the conventional values of society, but this is a rather negative agreement, and as for the positive side of it—salvation through perfect relationship with truth—we must remember the fundamental difference in their conception of truth. To Buddha it means insight into the vanity of life and man's desires; to the Bāüls it means a personal God. As for the first agreement—fulfilment by love's emancipating us from the dominance of self—this seems more reasonable, although, at a closer examination, the agreement appears to be only one of name, for the love of the teaching of Buddha and that of the Bāüls are quite different things. The Bāüls speak of man's love to God, whereas the love that Buddha has in view is our sympathy with human suffering. In all cases, therefore, the agreement is only formal, not real.

¹ *Ib.*, 18, 31 f., 57 f., 76 f., 83, 106; *Creative Unity*, 72; *The Religion of Man*, 86 f., *Fruit-Gathering*, nos. 19, 31, 43, etc.

² *Creative Unity*, 76.

This attempt at unifying two religions so different as the Bañis' warm and childlike faith in a personal God and Buddha's atheistic system of salvation through self-discipline is revealing as regards Tagore's eclectic bias as well as his lordly way of dealing with historical facts.

But it is interesting also in another respect. For it indicates the values Tagore was in search of in Buddhism. He desired a personal religion, not one consisting of traditional rites and ceremonies. Secondly, the Truth which Tagore was seeking was one which was exclusively related to human realities and needs, and this he found in Buddha's anthropocentric system. Thirdly, a central element in Tagore's religion is love, and this also he believed he found in the teachings of Buddha. Almost in every place where he is referring to Buddha the reference is to his teaching of love. Buddha's idea of the infinite, in the opinion of Tagore, was 'the infinite whose meaning is in the positive ideal of goodness and love', and the path leading to *nirvāna* 'is not merely through negation of evil thoughts and deeds but through the elimination of all limits to love':¹ it is 'the path of sacrifice—the utmost sacrifice of love'.²

Unquestionably Buddha taught sympathy or compassion with every suffering being. But most scholars who have investigated the teachings of Buddha agree that his teaching of sympathy is one of a negative character: do not cause any harm to any living creature; do not increase the sum of sufferings in this world.³ It is significant that one of the finest verses in *Suttanipāta*, which speaks of love even under the figure of a mother's love, is summed up in its closing line in this negative way: 'Free from ill-will, purged of all enmity.'⁴ Real positive and active love is impossible in the teaching of Buddha, on account of his *karma*-doctrine. Love binds the soul to life, and is thus a hindrance to salvation.⁵ This doctrine, at the same time, gives to the Buddhistic love a touch of egoism at its centre. In the teaching of Buddha the motive of compassion and sympathy is in regard not so much to the suffering as to the salvation of one's own soul. One of the most sympathetic apologists of Buddhism bluntly

¹ *The Religion of Man*, 70.

² *Creative Unity*, 71; cf. *Sādhana*, 57, 76, 83.

³ Edv. Lehmann: *Buddha*, 155 f. Oldenberg: *Aus dem alten Indien*, 6; K. J. Saunders: *Buddhist Ideals*, 76 ff.

⁴ K. J. Saunders: *The Heart of Buddhism*, 46.

⁵ Lehmann, *op. cit.*, 155. Cf. Saunders: *Buddhist Ideals*, 81.

states: 'That cordiality, which forgets itself for others, that affection which breeds tenderness and emotion, is entirely wanting here. The whole moral scheme in Buddhism is nothing but the sum in arithmetic set down by a bold clear egoism; as much as I give to others, so much will come again to me. *Kamma* is the most exact arithmetician in the world.'¹ It should be noted that the reference is to the Buddhistic teaching, not to the actual love of individuals.

In view of these facts it is astonishing that Tagore can speak of Buddha's teaching as 'the path of the utmost sacrifice of love'. Surely, the form of Buddhism he has in view is the Mahāyāna-Buddhism, which admittedly has given more room to human emotions and aspirations than did original Buddhism. According to Tagore, 'Mahāyāna had its origin in the positive element contained in Buddha's teaching.'² But this makes very little difference, for the Mahāyāna teaching of compassion is much the same as that of original Buddhism, and when Tagore indicates the positive element in Buddhist teaching as 'immeasurable love',³ and the path leading to *nirvāna* as 'the path of the utmost sacrifice of love', he clearly has converted a negative ideal into a positive, and, in addition, has given a quite new character to the whole idea. What has helped him to make this conversion, and from where does the idea of self-sacrificing love come? Evidently here 'the law of gravitation' is in operation. Some unseen celestial body is causing deviation from the calculated course.

All this does not mean that Buddha's teaching has had no influence on Tagore. It surely had. He has felt attracted by Buddha's teaching of renunciation and control of the self. But this influence should not be over-estimated. Tagore's teaching of renunciation is very different from that of Buddha. It is not, like Buddha's, a renunciation of the world. I can hardly agree with E. J. Thompson's statement that Tagore 'is almost more Buddhist than Hindu'.⁴ At the bottom there can be but little in common between the teacher who said that life is suffering and woe, and the poet who confessed: 'I have kissed this world with my eyes and my limbs, . . .

¹ Paul Dahlke: *Buddhist Essays*, 132 (quoted from Saunders: *Buddhist Ideals*, 76).

² *Creative Unity*, 71.

⁴ E. J. Thompson: *Rabindranath Tagore, his Life and Work*, 100.

and I love my life because I love the light of the sky so enwoven with me.'¹

In *The Religion of Man* one chapter is devoted to Zarathustra. There is no clear indication in Tagore's writings that the religion of Zarathustra has exercised any decisive influence upon him. It is difficult to say at what time Tagore began to take an interest in the Iranian prophet. In all probability, it was only after his own religious conceptions had taken a definite form. But he has found some points of inner agreement between the religion of the prophet of Persia and his own. From this point of view a study of his reflections on Zarathustra is interesting and instructive for our purpose.

'There can hardly be any question that he (Zarathustra) was the first man we know who gave a definitely moral character and direction to religion and at the same time preached the doctrine of monotheism, which offered an eternal foundation of reality to goodness as an ideal of perfection. All religions of the primitive type try to keep men bound with regulations of external observances. Zarathustra was the greatest of all the pioneer prophets who showed the path of freedom to man, the freedom of moral choice, the freedom from blind obedience to unmeaning injunctions, the freedom from the multiplicity of shrines which draw our worship away from the single-minded chastity of devotion.'²

In this way Tagore summarised the most outstanding values of the religious reformation through Zarathustra. From this summary it is clear that Tagore appreciated Zarathustra, first and foremost, as a pioneer prophet on the border between primitive religion and a more advanced stage in the evolution of man's spiritual capacities. Zarathustra was 'the first' and even 'the greatest of all the pioneer prophets'. He has given a new character and a new direction to religion; he has directed it towards moral aims. Secondly, he has made religion monotheistic, and, thirdly, he has made goodness the ideal of perfection. Lastly, he has shown the path of freedom, freedom of moral choice, and freedom of chaste and single-minded devotion. To Tagore 'unmeaning religious injunctions' and a 'multiplicity of shrines' signified a primitive stage of religious evolution, characterised by external aims and magic means.³

To this summary is added the universal character of Zarathustra's message. He was the first prophet who emancipated religion from

¹ *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 53.

² *The Religion of Man*, 75 f.

³ *Ib.* 74.

the exclusive narrowness of the tribal God, and offered it the universal Man,¹ he was the first one who addressed his words to all humanity, regardless of distance in space or time.²

He was 'a pioneer', 'the first'. Yet, in Tagore's opinion, he is not a fact of the past only,³ 'not alone a matter of academic interest for historical scholars', his voice is still a living voice. He has something to say also to people in our own time.

We need not, in this connection, concern ourselves with the question as to whether Tagore has rightly understood Zarathustra or whether his interpretation of the great Persian prophet contains some anachronisms. Here we are exclusively interested in the light thrown upon Tagore's own religion by his appreciation of Zarathustra. Apparently Tagore has sought support for his own religious ideas in the message of the great Iranian prophet. Time and again he comes back to the theme of Zarathustra the pioneer. 'He was the watcher in the night, who stood on the lonely peak facing the East and broke out singing the paeans of light to the sleeping world when the sun came out on the brim of the horizon.'⁴ Apparently Tagore felt himself kindred to the prophet of Iran. He considered himself a pioneer, standing 'on the lonely peak facing the East'. He was the great sentinel of the East.⁵

Already from this brief survey of some of the most obvious influences on Tagore it is clear that he has drawn upon many different sources, trying to get the best from each one of them, and leaving out that which did not suit him. He did so quite deliberately, for he was convinced that, in essentials, all religions agree. 'For myself,' he says, 'I feel proud whenever I find that the best in the world have their fundamental agreement.'⁶

Then, what about Christianity? He learnt from the Upanishadic Vedāntism, from the Vaishnavism of Bengal, from Buddhism, from the simple folk-religion of the Bāṭls and from the Zarathustrian religion of the hoary Iranian age. Did he learn anything from Christianity? Indisputably the Christian faith is one of the great world-religions, and admittedly it is one reaching up to the highest religious level. It would be strange if he did not find anything worthwhile to learn there.

¹ *Ib.*, 80.

²⁻⁴ *Ib.*, 82.

⁵ Cf. Durlab Singh: *The Sentinel of the East*; and Cyril Modak; 'Tagore, the Great Sentinel' (*Calcutta Review*, Oct., 1942).

⁶ *The Religion of Man*, 89.

As a matter of fact, in his chief account of his religious ideas and its sources, *The Religion of Man*, with all its references to so many different religious teachers and scriptures, we do not find a single reference to Christ or the New Testament. It is difficult to think that this is not a deliberate omission. E. J. Thompson reports the poet as having confessed on one occasion that he had never read the Bible.¹ In Mr. Thompson's opinion this confession 'helps to explain the remarkable thinness of his essays on Christ'.² This confession is astonishing. Tagore, who was known to be a very vast reader, especially of religious literature, had never read the Bible!

It seems, however, that he was more modest than necessary regarding his knowledge of Christian scriptures. For in some of his essays in earlier works like *Sādhanā*, *Personality* and *Creative Unity*, we find quotations from the Bible and allusions to Biblical ideas and expressions, which reveal some acquaintance with the Bible.³ When he, for example, speaks of 'the Kingdom of God'⁴ or of 'the great I Am',⁵ the origin of such expressions is obvious. True, in the vast production of Tagore, such instances are but a trifle. Yet the way in which Biblical metaphors and allusions to Biblical ideas are used shows a certain amount of familiarity with the Bible. But this knowledge he can have acquired at second hand.

Tagore very seldom makes mention of Christ. But the few places in which this occurs reveal a great reverence for Him. He sometimes places Buddha and Christ side by side,⁶ and in his message to the Generalissimo of China (a Christian) he referred to 'the two great men, Buddha and Christ'.⁷ In his essay on 'The East and the West' in *Creative Unity* he makes reference to the death of Christ, comparing, on the one hand, the despised teacher of Galilee, and, on the other, the representative of the proud Roman Empire: 'On that day there was, on the one hand, the agony, the humiliation, the death; on the other, the pomp of pride and festivity in the Governor's palace. And today? To whom, then, shall we bow

¹ E. J. Thompson: *Rabindranath Tagore, his Life and Work*, 100.

² See *Sādhanā*, 16, 31, 58, 85, 129, 159; *Personality*, 59, 115, 148, 158; *Man*, 2, 17, 52.

³ *Creative Unity*, 111; *Sādhanā*, 18, 129, 58, 129; *Personality*, 148; *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 40. *Poems*, no. 61.

⁴ *Personality*, 59, 72, 95; *Sādhanā*, 85. Cf. Exodus 3: 14; St. John 8: 58.

⁵ *Sādhanā*, p. 153.

⁷ Hira Lal Seth: *Tagore on China and Japan*, 25, 32.

our head?'¹ At Santiniketan he sometimes delivered addresses on the teachings of Christ,² although, in the opinion of E. J. Thompson, addresses characterised by 'remarkable thinness'.³

There can be no doubt that there has been Christian influence on Tagore. It is worth while to trace its possible channels.

It is a well-known fact that Tagore at different stages of his education studied in Christian schools. Young Rabindranath could never conform himself to the method of studies practised in ordinary schools. They seemed to him 'such a hideously cruel combination of hospital and gaol'.⁴ 'The Government Board of Education was not consulted when I took birth in the world', he complained later.⁵ When other schools had utterly failed in rousing Rabindranath's interest in studies his family tried putting him in St. Xavier's. The result was no better, and he remained there only for a short time. But one precious memory of St. Xavier's he held fresh and pure ever after—the memory of its teachers.⁶ 'I possess a memory which elevates my impression of the teachers there to an ideal plane', he says.⁷ It was especially the memory of Father De Peneranda, apparently not a very efficient teacher, but a man of a really religious mind and a tender heart, a Christlike soul. 'His features', says Tagore, 'were not handsome, but his countenance had for me a strange attraction. Whenever I looked on him his spirit seemed to be in prayer, a deep peace to pervade him within and without.'⁸ In this way Tagore pictured this teacher, and continues: 'I cannot speak for the other boys, but I felt in him the presence of a great soul, and even today the recollection of it seems to give me a passport into the silent seclusion of the temple of God.'⁹

In his seventeenth year Tagore sailed for England in the company of his elder brother Satyendranath. Reaching England, he was first sent to a school in Brighton. He did not stay long in this school either, 'but that was no fault of the school'.¹⁰ Apparently he felt much more happy in the Brighton school than in the schools at Calcutta. One thing in this school seemed to him very wonderful: the boys were not at all rude to him. On the contrary, they would often thrust oranges and apples into his pockets and run away. He could only ascribe this uncommon behaviour of theirs to his being a foreigner.¹¹

¹ *Creative Unity*, 108.

² C. F. Andrews: *Letters to a Friend*, 46.

³ See above, p. 29.

⁴, ⁵, ⁷ *Reminiscences*, 107 f.

⁶ *Personality*, 114.

⁸⁻⁹ *Reminiscences*, 109.

¹⁰⁻¹¹ *Ib.*, 159.

For my part, I do not think this explanation gives the whole truth.

From Brighton he went to London, where he was admitted into University College. Here he had opportunity in his leisure hours to attend the sittings of the House of Commons, where he listened to the speeches of Bright and Gladstone. The former especially made a deep impression upon him. 'As a boy in England,' he says many years later, 'I had the opportunity of listening to the speeches of John Bright, both inside and outside Parliament. The large-hearted, radical liberalism of those speeches, overflowing all narrow national bounds, had made so deep an impression on my mind that something of it lingers even today, even in these days of graceless disillusion.'¹

But even more important than these influences from school, university and Parliament seem to have been the impressions he received in the home of Dr. Scott, where he lived during this period in London. 'In a very short time', he says, 'I became like one of the family. Mrs. Scott treated me as a son, and the heartfelt kindness I got from her daughters is rare even from one's own relations.'² Tagore stayed in this home for some months. It lived in his memory throughout his life.³

At University College he had the opportunity of studying English literature under the guidance of Professor Henry Morley. Here a new world opened its wide horizon to him. From then till his last days he was an eager student of Western literature. After his return to India he began to translate into Bengali various works of Shelley, Browning, and others.

It is easy to underestimate the importance of this influence on Tagore. In many ways it was formative of his life and work, among other things, in regard to religion. English literature is steeped in Christian culture, and many of its writers had a decidedly Christian philosophy of life. This is the case especially with Browning, of whom Tagore admittedly was a great admirer. Among all the English poets with a definitely Christian faith it will suffice to point to Milton. Tagore also studied other Western poets and writers in English translations. Among them was Count Tolstoy, the Russian Christian Socialist. Hira Lal Seth has pointed out a number of parallels between Tolstoy and Tagore.⁴ Apparently Tagore had learnt much from the great Russian writer. The vehemence with

¹ Quoted from R. J. Paul: *Tagore and his Life-Campaign*, 14.

² *Reminiscences*, 165. ³ *Ib.*, 167.

⁴ Hira Lal Seth: *Tagore on Socialism and Russia*, 14 ff.

which Tagore criticised the conditions of the peasants was identical with that exhibited by Tolstoy in the matter of the Russian serfs. Similarly Tagore learned from Tolstoy how a writer could air his views on social reforms without directly associating himself with the political movements of the day. Tolstoy escaped the wrath of the Czar. Tagore also avoided following the example of Congressmen and did not go to prison. In Tolstoy's Russia there was no socialist movement in existence, only a violent underground movement disturbed the calm surface now and then. Tolstoy criticised this movement. Tagore adopted the same policy towards violence as a political means.¹

These and other parallels, although of a merely formal nature, show how closely Tagore followed the great Russian reformer. But it was not only policy and methods that he learnt from him. In regard to substance also the influence of Tolstoy on Tagore is obvious. In his plays and novels Tolstoy pleaded for the removal of the legal and other disabilities in the way of the serfs being recognised as free citizens in Russia. He depicted the condition of abject poverty to which they were reduced. He preached the gospel of socialism, although not the secularism propounded by Karl Marx and later by Lenin. Tolstoy's ideas were inspired by the New Testament, especially the Sermon on the Mount. The social interpretation he gave to the teaching of Christ stirred the hearts of many Christians in the West. To them it meant a rediscovery of the social elements in the Gospel.² In his writings he repeatedly pictured Christ as the friend of the poor and the downtrodden. It is not without reason, therefore, that he was known as the great exponent of the doctrine of Christian Socialism.

Admittedly Tagore was strongly influenced by Tolstoy. Hira Lal Seth speaks of 'the Tolstoy touch' which can be felt in many ways in Tagore's writings and activities, even in his *Swadeshi Samāj* movement, although this was essentially an Indian concept.³ Especially in Tagore's social ideas is the influence of Tolstoy apparent. 'There was a Tolstoy touch about all that Tagore said on the subject of socialism.'⁴ Through his brother Dwijendranath he was introduced to Western philosophy. His own philosophical and religious essays reveal a good knowledge of modern philosophical problems. Some

¹ Hira Lal Seth, *op. cit.*, 15.

² Cf. Nathan Söderblom: *Jesu Bärspredikan och var tid*.

³ Hira Lal Seth, *op. cit.*, 17, 39.

⁴ *Ib.*, 15.

of the Western philosophers whom he obviously has studied, like Rudolf Eucken and William James, were deeply rooted in the Christian faith.

Lastly, it should also be remembered that Tagore had intimate Christian friends, with whom he moved very closely, especially his helper during many years at Santiniketan, W. W. Pearson, and, above all, C. F. Andrews, 'Deenabandhu', the friendship with whom has a beautiful monument in *Letters to a Friend*. It may be assumed that they were more influenced by Tagore than he by them. But, surely, the influence was mutual. Tagore was 'not of stone', as he himself used to say, and there can be little doubt that the warm Christian faith of such friends meant something to him.

We have pointed out some obvious channels of a possible Christian influence on Tagore. He has studied in Christian schools and institutions under Christian leaders and with Christian schoolmates, who apparently have left some imprints on his heart. He has lived in Christian homes, and moved with Christian friends, he has done extensive reading of Western literature, and notably taken a strong interest in writers whose works were profoundly Christian in aim and outlook. Is it safe to assume that all this has left no abiding influence on him?

Beside these channels of direct Christian influence, it may be possible to prove the existence of an indirect influence through channels which are more or less concealed from immediate observation. We have already pointed to one such influence *via* Sufism and the Bengal Vaishnavism, especially that of Rāmānanda and Kabīr and their followers. There may be other such channels.

As a youth Tagore breathed the air of Brāhma Samāj, the founder of which was Ram Mohan Roy. It is not necessary here to tell the story of this great reformer, 'the pioneer of the modern Indian Renaissance'.¹ His great admiration for the English language and Western civilisation, his vast activities for reforms in almost all departments of life, especially in regard to religion and education, his fight against idolatry, animal sacrifices, polygamy, the burning of widows, and other bad customs within Hinduism are well-known facts. It would be foolish to claim him as a Christian, which he certainly was not. But it would be even more foolish to deny the Christian influence on him, claiming that all the motive forces of his

¹ D. S. Sarma : *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, 71.

reform work are to be found within his ancestral religion. He took pains to show that he was not going against the best traditions of his country, but, as Professor Sarma says: 'Ram Mohan was primarily moved by considerations of humanity.'¹ Any sincere investigation into this matter will come to the conclusion that, along with some Muhammedan influence, it was the impact of the Christian culture of the West that enabled him to see the evil practices in Hinduism, and roused the reforming spirit in him. He had no understanding of the central facts of Christianity, but he had a fair knowledge of the Bible, and he was much impressed by the ethical loftiness of the teachings of Jesus, which is evidenced by his book *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness*. Here he tried to separate the moral precepts in the New Testament from the religious matters contained in that book, because he felt convinced that, in this way, they 'will be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions'.² I cannot agree with Professor Sarma, that this is an 'eminently reasonable and sane attitude',³ for, in my opinion, it is just as reasonable and sane as separating a tree from its roots, expecting that thereby it 'will be more likely to produce the desirable effect'. But, nevertheless, this book by the great reformer, along with the large number of other facts, reveals the vast influence of Christianity on Ram Mohan Roy and his reforming work.

There can be little doubt that this Christian influence played no small role in forming the ideas which underlie the 'Brāhma Samāj', which was founded in 1828. The weekly congregational worship—at that time a novel thing in Hinduism—consisting of the reading of the Scriptures, a sermon, and the singing of hymns, is evidently modelled after the Christian forms of worship. It is also significant that the members of the association translated the word *Samāj* by 'Church', a custom which has got into the language of Rabindranath also.⁴ Further, the methods of social and other activities are almost without exception borrowed from the Christian Church and mission. Its criticism of social wrongs and religious evil customs like the burning of widows, infanticide, and forced widowhood, child marriage, *purdah*, religious prostitution, untouchability, caste distinctions, etc., hitherto regarded as decrees of God, was almost

¹ *Ib.*, 91.

² *Ib.*, 76.

³ *Cf. ib.*, 75.

⁴ *The Religion of Man*, 110.

entirely Christian criticism.¹ The same is the case with their stern rejection of any kind of idolatry and other superstitious practices, their positive endeavours in promoting morality, charity and personal piety.²

All this has gone into the very blood of Rabindranath. His criticism of ordinary Hinduism is revealing in this respect. 'We Indians', he said, 'have had the sad experience in our part of the world how timid orthodoxy, its irrational repressions and its accumulation of dead centuries, dwarfs man through its idolatry of the past. Seated rigid in the centre of stagnation, it firmly ties the human spirit to the revolving wheels of habit till faintness overwhelms her. Like a sluggish stream choked by rotting weeds, it is divided into shallow slimy pools that shroud their dumbness in a narcotic mist of stupor. This mechanical spirit of tradition is essentially materialistic, it is blindly pious but not spiritual, obsessed by phantoms of unreason that haunt feeble minds in the ghastly disguise of religion. For our soul is shrunken when we allow foolish days to weave repeated patterns of unmeaning meshes round all departments of life.'³

It is no wonder that the spirit of the Brāhma Samāj is traceable in Rabindranath's ideas of true religion. For it was in the air of this 'Church' that he grew up. His grandfather, 'Prince' Dwarkanath Tagore, was a great friend and admirer of Ram Mohan Roy, and Rabindranath's father, Devendranath Tagore, the *Maharshi*, had studied in Ram Mohan Roy's Anglo-Hindu school. From his personal intercourse with its great founder he received impressions which later proved to be of decisive importance.⁴ In 1842 he joined the Brāhma Samāj, and soon he became its leader.

Devendranath Tagore is reported as being less English and more Indian in his views and sympathies than Ram Mohan Roy. 'To him,' says his son Satyendranath, who has translated his *Autobiography* from Bengali into English, 'ancient India was the cradle of all that was pure in morals and religion. He was a man more deeply imbued than anyone in modern times with the genuine spirit of the ancient *Rishis*.'⁵ 'It is singular,' he says, 'that the one field of religious inspiration which was foreign to him was the Hebrew Scriptures. He

¹ D. S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, 68 f.

² Cf. Hastings: *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. II, 823.

³ *The Religion of Man*, 120 f.

⁴ Devendranath Tagore: *Autobiography*, 54 f. ⁵ *Ib.*, 13.

was never known to quote the Bible, nor do we find any allusions to Christ or His teaching in his sermons.¹ It would seem that such an attitude would exclude any non-Hindu influence. 'His religion was Indian in origin and expression, it was Indian in ideas and in spirit', concludes his son in his introduction to this translation of the *Autobiography*.²

A close study of the *Autobiography*, however, does not fully corroborate this conclusion. Non-Hindu influences are obvious enough. He did not read only Hindu literature. As a young man he studied numerous English works, especially on philosophy. But they could not heal the sense of emptiness, from which he was suffering, he complains.³ This, however, need not imply that this Western philosophy left no impression upon him. It seems to have rendered him the service of taking away for him the foundation of idol worship and superstitious practices. After a long period of longing and seeking after truth he found peace in the writings of the Upanishads.⁴ Yet the words in which he speaks of this experience are significant: 'My mind and heart were fully satisfied by finding presented in a more vivid manner in the Upanishads the truths at which I had arrived beforehand through my own poor understanding by the grace of God.'⁵ From this statement it seems clear that the Upanishads were not the origin of his conception of God: he felt happy in finding that they presented *the truth at which he had arrived beforehand* through his own 'poor understanding'. 'In the Upanishads', he says in another place, 'I found the echo of the idea of God that had been revealed to my heart after long continuous struggle and endeavour.' Apparently other forces had been formative of his religious ideas. Afterwards he found an 'echo' of them in the Upanishads.

That this faith, formed partly under non-Hindu influence, was by no means so conformable to the teachings of the Upanishads as Devendranath himself first believed is evidenced beyond any doubt by his own subsequent experiences. He tells the story of his search for a foundation of his new faith: 'First I went back to the Vedas, but could not lay the foundation of the *Brāhma Dharma*⁶ there; then I came to the eleven authentic Upanishads, but how unfortunate! even there I could not lay the foundation. Our relation with God is that of worshipper and worshipped—this is the very essence of Brāhmaism.'⁷

¹ *Ib.*, 13. ² *Ib.*, 47. ³ See above, pp. 14-15. ⁴ *Autobiography*, 91.

⁵ 'The faith of the Brāhma Samāj.

When we found the opposite conclusion to this arrived at in Sankaracharya's *Śārīrah mīmāṃsā* of the *Vedānta Darśana*, we could no longer place any confidence in it, nor could we accept it as a support of our religion. I had thought that if I renounced the *Vedānta Darśana* and accepted the eleven Upanishads only I would find a support for Brāhmaism; hence I had relied entirely upon these, leaving aside all else. But when in the Upanishads I came across 'I am He', and 'Thou art 'That', then I became disappointed in them also. These Upanishads could not meet all our needs; could not fill our hearts. Then what was to be done now? What hope was there for us?'¹

In Professor Sarma's opinion, 'these words betray a lamentable lack of humility.'² This seems to me a hard and unfair verdict. Apparently Devendranath's mind was one of a rare sincerity, which was unable to compromise with evidenced truth, or by a twisted exegesis to make religious texts say something which they do not say. To me it is impossible to read the frank confession of this truth-loving soul without being touched. 'I had started the propagation of *Brāhma Dharma*, making them (the eleven Upanishads) its foundation. But now I saw that even this foundation was shaky and built upon sand', he says.³ At last he had no other refuge than his own heart and intuition. 'I came to see that the pure heart, filled with the light of intuitive knowledge—this was its basis.'⁴

This failure to find a foundation for his faith in the Vedas and in the Upanishads is evidence, which leaves no room for any doubt, that his faith had not its origin there. Other forces had been in operation in forming it.

What these forces were Devendranath reveals in a discourse delivered in 1841 at the first, and last, anniversary of the Tatwa Bodhini Sabha, a religious association which he had founded, but which shortly afterwards he merged into the Brāhma Samāj. 'There is no doubt', he said in the speech, 'that the study of the English language is tending to advance the cause of learning, and that the darkness of ignorance has been dispelled in a great measure from the minds of the people of this country. Nowadays they do not feel disposed to worship stocks and stones like the ignorant masses, thinking them to be divine.'⁵

¹ *Autobiography*, 160 f.

² D. S. Sarma: *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, 97.

³ *Autobiography*, 160.

⁴ *Ib.*, 161.

⁵ *Autobiography*, 65.

This speech, in its main part, reveals a great love for and confidence in the ancient Hindu religion. The greater therefore is the importance of the fact that notwithstanding this love it points to the Western education introduced by Ram Mohan Roy as the source of the new light, and the force through which 'the darkness and ignorance had been dispelled'. In more than one place in the *Autobiography* he definitely points to Ram Mohan Roy and his influence upon him in this respect. 'As soon as I came to understand that God was without form or image, a strong antipathy to idolatry arose in my mind. I remembered Ram Mohan Roy—I came to my senses. I pledged myself heart and soul to follow in his footsteps.'¹

I have given some space to the analysis of this problem, because it is generally maintained that Devendranath's religion 'was Indian in origin and expression',² and that no Christian influence could have reached Rabindranath through his father.³ The above account of Devendranath's search for truth shows that this is not so, but that a considerable Christian influence was operating in his father and indirectly reached Rabindranath through him and through the religious society of which Devendranath was the leader. This fact is typical of the complicated nature of religious influence.

In his twenty-third year Rabindranath was made the secretary of the 'Church' of his father. In his later years he grew out of the limits of this society, and, after a long time of struggle, gave up his connection with it.⁴ But the gist of its faith never left him.

In addition, indirect Christian influence reached him through all the Western education and culture which the modern age had introduced in India. Today this influence in the country is so great that no Indian of education can escape it.

The impact of Western culture upon Tagore, as we have seen, was not limited to English education in India. His vast reading, his travels in Europe, his intercourse with Western friends, made him already, in the plastic period in his life, fully acquainted with Western culture and civilisation. This was a privilege and an asset, the great value of which he always acknowledged. In the speech with which he opened the exhibition of his pictures at Munich in

¹ *Ib.*, 54.

² See above, pp. 35-36.

³ E. J. Thompson: *Rabindranath Tagore, His Life and Work*, 100.

⁴ See above, p. 22.

1930, he remarked about the technique of these pictures, which was quite European, that he was proud of this fact, for this shows that he has been successful, at least to some extent, in bringing about in himself a union of the spirit of the East and the West.¹

Naturally he found much to criticise in Western civilisation, and Europe would have been wise to have paid more heed to his criticisms and warnings. Yet he was convinced that the East had much to learn from the West, and *vice versa*. 'I know Santiniketan will not bring forth its fullness of flowers and fruit if it does not send its roots into the Western soil', he wrote.² And it was by no means only science and technique that he wished the East to learn from the West; it was, above all, ideals: 'When the streams of ideals that flow from the East and from the West mingle their murmurs in some profound harmony of meaning it delights my soul', he says in his Hibbert Lectures.³ In an address on Ram Mohan Roy in 1915 he said: 'Many are under the impression that the West is devoid of spirituality, that it is great only materially. I do not agree. I think no nation can be truly great except through spirituality. Those who know the history of their philanthropy, their sacrifice and their charity can never endorse this view.'⁴

In *Creative Unity* he says: 'The active love of humanity and the spirit of martyrdom for the cause of justice and truth which I have met with in the Western countries have been a great lesson and inspiration to me. I have no doubt in my mind that the West owes its true greatness, not so much to its marvellous training of intellect as to its spirit of service devoted to the welfare of man.'⁵

In his old age, wounded in the roots of his being by the horrors of the second world-war, his faith in the future of Western culture was rudely shaken, and it seems that his hope for humanity was more exclusively turned to the East.⁶ This shipwreck of Western civilisation caused him bitter sorrow and pain, but there is no indication that he ever denied his great indebtedness to the West.

Tagore's deep appreciation of Western culture and its spirituality needs no further proof; it was too obvious and well-known. But one

¹ R. I. Paul: *Tagore and his Life-Campaign*, 74.

² Quoted from Marjorie Sykes: *Rabindranath Tagore*, 88.

³ *The Religion of Man*, 88.

⁴ Quoted from R. I. Paul, *op. cit.*, 44. ⁵ *Creative Unity*, 104.

⁶ On the other hand, he was also deeply disappointed about the East. There also he saw the same betrayal of spiritual values. Cf. *Poems*, no. 108.

thing must be noted here, because it is often overlooked—this spirituality is Christian. Western culture, for two thousand years, has been saturated with Christian ideals, or, rather, it is built upon the Christian faith as its foundation. Therefore it is bound to fall to pieces if it turns away from this faith. There has been a colossal apostasy from religion in the West going on for more than half a century. The result is the greatest catastrophe the world has ever seen. Yet, even in its ruins, Western culture cannot fully get rid of its Christian heritage. This is so interwoven with the very substance of its fabric that it is not possible to acquire anything of Western culture without, at the same time, getting something of the Christian spirit.

This holds true also in regard to Western civilisation in India. It is impossible to become a partaker of modern education and civilisation in India without being, to some extent, influenced by the ideals of the Christian faith.

That Tagore has been influenced by Christianity, directly and indirectly, is a fact which admits of no doubt. Quite another question is, in what way this influence has been operating in his soul, and what fruit it has ripened in his religion. This is the question to which we now turn.

II

TAGORE'S BASIC RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Tagore has termed his religion 'The Religion of Man'. It is not a theological system or a merely philosophical product; it is the outcome of his own personal experience. In his Hibbert Lectures, which give the mature expression of his religious views, but which also contain material from many discourses from earlier periods of his life, he says: 'The fact that one theme runs through all only proves to me that the Religion of Man has been growing within my mind as a religious experience.'¹

His religion is something that 'has been growing' within him, and this growth covers a long period of his life, from his 'immature youth to the present time' (1936). Yet, he was also conscious of a special religious experience, to which he attributed great importance, and which he termed 'the vision'.² In several different contexts he refers to this remarkable event in his life.

There is a slight confusion in his writings as to the time and the order of sequence of these experiences—for there seem to have been at least three of the kind. In *Reminiscences* he tells of two such events, which took place at the time when he was living with his brother Jyotirindra in a separate house in Sudder Street in Calcutta and was working at his *Evening Songs*. This takes us to the year 1882, when he was about twenty-one years old. The first of these experiences he had one evening at the Tagore house 'Jorasanko', the second one came to him one morning on the veranda of his brother's house in Sudder Street.³ In *The Religion of Man* he also tells of two such experiences, the first of which apparently is identical with the event in Sudder Street, but he places it in his eighteenth year.⁴ The second one is not identical with the 'Jorasanko' experience, for it took place several years afterwards in a village, where he was employed in some work.⁵

The confusion is about the Sudder Street experience, whether it took place in 1879 or in 1882. As Tagore in 1879 was living in

¹ *The Religion of Man*, 7.

² *Ib.*, 90.

³ *Reminiscences*, 216 ff.

⁴ *The Religion of Man*, 93 f.

⁵ *Ib.*, 94 f.

England, the preference is to be given to 1882, and we must take it that the time indicated in *The Religion of Man* is due to a slip of memory. We give the account of the two first experiences as they are related in *Reminiscences*.

‘After we had stayed for a time by the river my brother Jyotirindra took a separate house in Calcutta, on Sudder Street near the Museum. I remained with him. While I went on here with the novel and the *Evening Songs*, a momentous revolution of some kind came about within me.

‘One day, late in the afternoon, I was pacing the terrace of our “Jorasanko” house. The afterglow of the sunset combined with the wan twilight in a way which seemed to give the approaching evening a specially wonderful attractiveness for me. Even the walls of the adjoining house seemed to grow beautiful. Is this uplifting of the cover of triviality from the everyday world, I wondered, due to some magic in the evening-light? Never!

‘I could see at once that it was the effect of the evening which had come within *me*; its shades had obliterated my *self*. While the self was rampant during the glare of the day, everything I perceived was mingled with and hidden by it. Now that the self was put into the background, I could see the world in its own true aspect. And that aspect has nothing of triviality in it, it is full of beauty and joy.

‘Since this experience I repeatedly tried the effect of deliberately suppressing my *self* and viewing the world as a mere spectator, and was invariably rewarded with the sense of special pleasure. I remember I tried also to explain to a relative how to see the world in its true light, and the incidental lightening of one’s own sense of burden which follows such vision; but, as I believe, with no success.

‘Then I gained a further insight which has lasted all my life.

‘The end of Sudder Street, and the trees on the Free School grounds opposite, were visible from our Sudder Street house. One morning I happened to be standing on the verandah looking that way. The sun was just rising through the leafy tops of those trees. As I continued to gaze, all of a sudden a covering seemed to fall away from my eyes, and I found the world bathed in a wonderful radiance, with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side. This radiance pierced in a moment through the folds of sadness and despondency which had accumulated over my heart, and flooded it with this universal light.’¹

¹ *Reminiscences*, 216 f. Cf. C. F. Andrews: *Letters to a Friend*, 24.

In *The Religion of Man* Tagore gives the following interpretation of this experience: 'The invisible screen of the commonplace was removed from all things and all men, and their ultimate significance was intensified in my mind, and this is the definition of beauty. That which was memorable in this experience was its human message, the sudden expansion of my consciousness in the super-personal world of man.'¹

The immediate poetical outcome of this experience was the poem *The Awakening of the Waterfall*, which was written the same day and 'gushed forth and coursed on like a veritable cascade'.² The source of the Ganges is high up in the Himalayas' frozen caves. Its spirit lies dormant in its ice-bound isolation, but it is touched by the sun, and, bursting in a cataract of freedom, it finds its finality in an unending sacrifice, in a continual union with the sea. This is a picture not only of the sacred Ganges but also of the soul of the poet: the dormant forces of his soul, bound in the icy grip of the trivialities of life, had been touched by the divine light and set free. It now streamed forth in glad freedom, seeking union with the divine ocean of beauty and joy.

This joy-aspect of the universe caused him to see all things and persons in a glad and pleasing light. He could not look upon the sight of two smiling youths nonchalantly going their way, the arm of the one on the other's shoulder, as a matter of small moment; it seemed to him like a spray of the fathomless depths of the eternal spring of joy, from which numberless sprays of laughter leap up throughout the world. Even the presence of a foolish person, whose visits used to be an annoyance to him, was now a joy to him. 'I was filled with an immense gladness, and felt rid of some enveloping tissue of untruth, which had been causing me so much needless and uncalled-for discomfort and pain . . . From my infancy I had seen only with my eyes, I now began to see with the whole of my consciousness.'³

The glory of this vision lasted for some days (according to *The Religion of Man*⁴ for four days; according to C. F. Andrews, *Letters to a Friend*,⁵ seven or eight days), but then, gradually, it faded away. Together with his brother he went to Darjeeling, expecting, in the Himalayas, to see more deeply into that which had

¹ *The Religion of Man*, 94.

² *Reminiscences*, 217.

³ *Ib.*, 219.

⁴ 94.

⁵ 24.

been revealed to him. But there at once he became aware that he had lost his vision. He found that it was a mistake to believe that he could get more of truth from the outside. The sky-piercing mountains of the Himalayas could not give him anything, while 'He who is the Giver can vouchsafe a vision of the eternal universe in the dingiest of lanes, and in a moment of time.'¹

At Darjeeling, however, he finished his *Morning Songs*, the closing poem of which is *The Echo*. The meaning of this somewhat enigmatic poem he interpreted many years later in *Reminiscences*² in the following way: 'When from the original fount in the depth of the Universe streams of melody are sent forth abroad, their echo is reflected into our heart from the faces of our beloved and the other beauteous things around us. It must be, as I suggested, this echo which we love, and not the things themselves from which it happens to be reflected, for that which one day we scarce deign to glance at may be, on another, the very thing which claims our whole devotion.'³

To these experiences is added another of the same kind some years later in a lonely village, of which he tells in *The Religion of Man*: 'When I grew older and was employed in a responsible work in some villages I took my place in a neighbourhood where the current of time ran slow and joys and sorrows had their simple and elemental shades and lights. The day which had a special significance for me came with all its drifting trivialities of the commonplace life. The ordinary work of my morning had come to its close, and before going to take my bath I stood for a moment at my window, overlooking a marketplace on the bank of a dry river bed, welcoming the first flood of rain along its channel. Suddenly I became conscious of a stirring of soul within me. My world of experience in a moment seemed to become lighted, and facts that were detached and dim found a great unity of meaning. The feeling which I had was like that which a man, groping through a fog without knowing his destination, might feel when he suddenly discovers that he stands before his own house.'⁴

Tagore compares this experience with one he had as a small boy, when in a trivial Primer of Bengali he suddenly came to a rhymed sentence of combined words: 'It rains, the leaves tremble.' At once he came to a world where he recovered full meaning. The rhythmic picture of the tremulous leaves beaten by the rain opened before his

¹ *Reminiscences*, 221.

²⁻³ *Ib.*, 223.

⁴ *The Religion of Man*, 94 f.; cf. *Reminiscences*, 4.

mind a world in harmony with his own being. 'In a similar manner,' he writes, 'on that morning in the village the facts of my life suddenly appeared to me in a luminous unity of truth. All things that had seemed like vagrant waves were revealed to my mind in relation to a boundless sea. I felt sure that some Being who comprehended me and my world was seeking his best expression in all my experiences, uniting them into an ever-widening individuality which is a spiritual work of art.'¹ He adds: 'I felt I had found my religion at last, the religion of Man.'² It seems that he had some similar experiences later in life. Kshiti Mohan Sen has informed me that the poet told him of such experiences in the years 1914-16.³

These experiences, probably, had been preceded by some kind of preparation in his mind. In *Reminiscences* he has given a brief summary of his religious development up to this point of his life. 'From my earlier days', he writes, 'I enjoyed a simple and intimate communion with Nature. Each one of the cocoanut trees in our garden had for me a distinct personality.'⁴ 'It was as if Nature held something in her closed hands and was smilingly asking us: "What d'you think I have?"'⁵

It seems that this is a very common experience to children all over the world, and especially to those endowed with a strong imaginative faculty.⁶ But there will come a day when this play will cease, and the heart feels the cold and triviality of the life of daily works and duties. This, naturally, happened also to Rabindranath. Then his hungry heart began to cry out for its sustenance; he felt as if 'a barrier was set up between this play of inside and outside'.⁷ He also remained coldly aloof from the religion of his family. 'It was through an idiosyncrasy of my temperament that I refused to accept any religious teaching merely because people in my surroundings believed it to be true. I could not persuade myself to imagine that I had a religion because everybody whom I might trust believed in its value.'⁸ He gave vent to his feelings at this stage of his life in his *Evening Songs*. 'This loss of the harmony between inside and outside, due to the overriding claims of the heart in its hunger, and

¹⁻² *The Religion of Man*, 96.

³ Cf. *Personality*, 133.

⁴ *Reminiscences*, 226 ff.

⁵ *Ih*, 20; cf. *Crossing*, no. 71.

⁶ Cf. Dorothy Wilson: *Child Psychology*, 46, and A. A. Lemoreaux: *The Unfolding Life*, 59.

⁷ *Reminiscences*, 227.

⁸ *The Religion of Man*, 91.

consequent restriction of the privilege of communion which had been mine, was mourned by me in the *Evening Songs*.¹

Then all of a sudden nature opened its closed doors to him again through this 'momentous revolution' of a 'vision', and he 'celebrated the sudden opening of a gate in the barrier' in his *Morning Songs*. 'Thus', he says, 'did the First Book of my life come to an end with these chapters of union, separation and reunion.'²

There can be no doubt that Tagore attributed a great importance to these experiences, which caused 'a momentous revolution' within him. He did not 'claim any right to preach',³ for the experience was one of an individual character. Yet, he speaks of it in terms which suggest a revelation. He calls it 'the outburst of an experience which is unusual', 'an unexpected inner message',⁴ 'a sudden spiritual outburst from within me which is like the underground current of a perennial stream unexpectedly welling up on the surface'.⁵ It was a 'vision'. The result was a religion of his own, a new religion, 'the religion of Man'.⁶

A striking feature of this repeated experience of Tagore's was its close relation to nature. The rays of the sun, rising or setting, the leaves of green trees, the pattering drops of rain, the streamlet in the sand of a dry river-bed, play a great role in these events. The question is whether this indicates a really religious experience. Tagore's account of his 'vision' reminds the present writer of a few similar experiences in his own life, one of which was one of a singular intensity. He had passed through a time of struggle and uncertainty in regard to some personal matters. Now he was travelling to meet his brother and sister-in-law in order to spend a few weeks of rest with them in a quiet corner of the country. He was standing at the window in the compartment of a slowly moving train, looking at the picturesque scenery of the Province of Dalecarlia in Sweden. Beyond the white stems of slender-branched birch-trees the lake of Siljan mirrored the blue sky above. A gentle shower had just watered the meadows on the shores of the lake, and the glittering water-drops on the leaves and the flowers reflected the rays of the reappearing sun. Suddenly he felt a soothing joy welling up within him. It seemed to him that the glittering waterdrops, the trees and the flowers had

¹ *Reminiscences*, 227.

² *Ib.*, 228.

³ *The Religion of Man*, 92.

⁴ *Ib.*, 109.

⁵ *Ib.*, 91.

⁶ See above, p. 41.

become living beings who shared his melancholy joy. He felt the sacred bond of sympathy and union with nature all around him. This feeling disappeared when the train stopped with a shrill whistle and a jerk at the next station, but the sweet peace remained for a few days.

Although I would by no means deny that there was some religious element in this experience, I would not call it a characteristically religious one. My genuinely religious experiences have been of a quite different type. This experience at the window of the train-compartment seems to me to have more of an aesthetic than of a religious character.

As for Tagore, it is certain that he would not deny the genuinely aesthetical character of his experiences, but, in his opinion, this does not diminish their religious quality. For to him art and religion are indissolubly connected with each other; they are almost identical. He calls his religion 'the poet's religion'.¹ 'My religious life,' he says, 'has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetical life. Somehow they are wedded to each other.'² This statement implies more than a parallelism between his art and his religion. They are to him two aspects of the same thing. This is already evident from his reference in this context to his experience with the rhymed phrase in his Bengali primer,³ which was clearly an experience of an aesthetic character. And it is expressly stated in his comments on the Sudder Street experience: 'The invisible screen of the commonplace was removed from all things and all men, and their ultimate significance was intensified in my mind, *and this is the definition of beauty*.'⁴ 'Beauty' is one of the key-words in the accounts of his religious experiences. Art, in his opinion, is a religious function, or, we could almost say, *the* religious function. For, in Tagore's piety, it takes the place which prayer occupies in the Christian religious life. 'In Art', Tagore says, 'the person in us is sending its answers to the Supreme Person, Who reveals Himself to us in a world of endless beauty across the lightless world of facts.'⁵ Rightly Cyril Modak says: 'What is called a philosophy of life was with him an aesthetic of life.'⁶

¹⁻² *The Religion of Man*, 93; *Creative Unity*, 3, 16.

³ See above, pp. 44-45.

⁴ *The Religion of Man*, 94. (The italics are mine).

⁵ *Personality*, 38.

⁶ 'Tagore, the Great Sentinel' (*Calcutta Review*, 1942, p. 129).

If we compare this aesthetico-religious experience of Tagore with the decisive religious experiences of some saints of a typically Biblical character, like Isaiah, St. Paul, St. Augustine and Martin Luther, the difference is obvious.

We have the stories of their decisive religious experiences told in their own words. Of Isaiah we read in the 6th chapter of his book:

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the thresholds were moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here am I; send me.

St. Paul has given more than one account of his momentous experience on the road to Damascus. We choose the one found in the 22nd chapter of the Acts:

Now as I neared Damascus on my journey, suddenly about noon a brilliant light from heaven flashed round me. I dropped to the earth and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you?' I asked. He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, and you are persecuting me.' (My companions saw the light, but they did not hear the voice of him who talked to me.) I said, 'What am I to do?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and make your way into Damascus; there you shall be told about all you are destined to do.' As I could not see, owing to the dazzling glare of that light, my companions took my hand and so I reached Damascus. Then

a certain Ananias, a devout man in the Law, who had a good reputation among all the Jewish inhabitants, came to me and standing beside me said, 'Saul, my brother, regain your sight!' The same moment I regained my sight and looked up at him. Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One, and to hear him speak with his own lips. For you are to be a witness for him before all men, a witness of what you have seen and heard. And now, why do you wait? Get up and be baptized and wash away your sins, invoking his name.'

St. Augustine has written a whole book about his fundamental religious experience. We shall quote a few passages from Books VIII and IX of his *Confessions*:

O my God, let me, with thanksgiving, remember, and confess unto Thee Thy mercies on me. Let my bones be bedewed with Thy love, and let them say unto Thee, Who is like unto Thee, O Lord? Thou hast broken my bonds in sunder, I will offer unto Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving. And how Thou hast broken them, I will declare; and all who worship Thee, when they hear this, shall say, 'Blessed be the Lord, in heaven and in earth, great and wonderful is His name.' Thy words had stuck fast in my heart, and I was hedged round about on all sides by Thee. Of Thy eternal life I was now certain, though I saw it in a figure and as through a glass. . . . But for my temporal life, all was wavering, and my heart had to be purged from the old leaven. The Way, the Saviour Himself, well pleased me, but as yet I shrunk from going through its straitness. . . .

My will the enemy held, and thence had made a chain for me, and bound me. For of a froward will, was a lust made; and a lust served, became custom; and custom not resisted, became necessity. By which links, as it were, joined together (whence I called it a chain) a hard bondage held me enthralled. But that new will which had begun to be in me, freely to serve Thee, and to wish to enjoy Thee, O God, the only assured pleasantness, was not yet able to overcome my former wilfulness, strengthened by age. Thus did my two wills, one new, and the other old, one carnal, the other spiritual, struggle within me; and by their discord, undid my soul.

Thus soul-sick was I, and tormented, accusing myself much more severely than my wont, rolling and turning me in my chain, till that were wholly broken, whereby I now was but just, but still was, held. And Thou, O Lord, pressedst upon me in my inward parts by a severe mercy, redoubling the lashes of fear and shame, lest I should again give away, and not bursting that same slight remaining tie, it should recover strength, and bind me the faster. For I said within myself, 'Be it done now, be it done now.' And as I spake, I all but enacted it. I all but did it, and did it not. . . .

But when a deep consideration had from the secret bottom of my soul drawn together and heaped up all my misery in the sight of my heart; there arose a mighty storm, bringing a mighty shower of tears. . . . I cast myself down I know not how, under a certain fig-tree, giving full vent to my tears; and the floods of mine eyes gushed out, an acceptable sacrifice to Thee. And, not indeed in these words, yet to this purpose, spake I much unto Thee: And Thou, O Lord, how long? How long, Lord, wilt Thou be angry, for ever? Remember not our former iniquities, for I felt that I was held by them. I sent up these sorrowful words; How long? how long, 'tomorrow and tomorrow?' Why not now? Why not is there this hour an end to my uncleanness?

So was I speaking, and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighbouring house a voice, as of boy or girl, I know not, chanting, and oft repeating, 'Take up and read; take up and read.' Instantly, my countenance altered, I began to think most intently, whether children were wont in any kind of play to sing such words: nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So checking the torrent of my tears, I arose; interpreting it to be no other than a command from God, to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find. . . . I seized . . . the volume of the Apostle . . . opened, and in silence read that section, on which my eyes first fell: Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying: but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence.¹ No further would I read; nor needed I: for

¹ Rom. 13: 13, 14.

instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.

O Lord, I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant, and the son of Thy handmaid: Thou hast broken my bonds in sunder. I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of praise. Let my heart and my tongue praise Thee; yea let all my bones say, O Lord, who is like unto Thee? Let them say, and answer Thou me, and say unto my soul, I am Thy salvation. Who am I, and what am I? What evil have not been either my deeds, or if not my deeds, my words, or if not my words, my will? But Thou, O Lord, art good and merciful, and Thy right hand had respect unto the depth of my death, and from the bottom of my heart emptied that abyss of corruption. And this Thy whole gift was, to nill what I willed, and to will what Thou willedst. But where through all those years, and out of what low and deep recess was my free-will called forth in a moment, whereby to submit my neck to Thy easy yoke, and my shoulders unto Thy light burthen, O Christ Jesus, my Helper and my Redeemer?¹

Luther has told the story of his religious experience in the graphic language of a hymn, *Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g'mein*, some verses of which we give here in a verse translation:

The devil's captive, bound I lay,
Death's punishment awaiting;
My inborn sins did night and day
Distress me, ever baiting;
I could not do the thing I would
In all my life was nothing good,
Sin had possessed me wholly.

My good works could no comfort shed,
Worthless they must be rated;
My free will to all good was dead
And God's good judgement hated.
Me of all hopes my sins bereft,
Nothing but death to me was left,
And death—was hell's dark portal!

¹ *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, translated by E. B. Pusey, 184 ff. Blackie; 187 ff. (Medici).

Then God in everlasting grace
 Did look on me so wretched,
 And mercy taking judgement's place
 To me its help outstretched.
 The Father's heart to me was stirred
 To save—not with a sovereign word—
 His very best it cost Him.

He said to His beloved Son:
 ' 'Tis time for mediation,
 Go hence, My heart's most precious Crown,
 Be to the lost salvation.
 His heavy sins take Thou away,
 And death, his cruel foe, do slay,
 And make him with Thee rising.'

Willing the Son took that behest,
 Born of a maiden mother
 To His own earth He came a guest
 And made Himself my Brother.
 All secretly He went His way,
 Veiled in my mortal flesh He lay,
 And thus the fiend He vanquished.

He said to me: 'Cling close to Me,
 Thy sorrows now are ending:
 Freely I give Myself for thee,
 Thy life with Mine defending;
 For I am thine and thou art Mine,
 And where I am there thou shalt shine,
 Our love no fiend shall sever.'¹

Luther goes on to tell how Christ shed His holy blood, and even gave His life for him. Thereby He broke the power of sin and death and the devil. Christ's righteousness cleansed away his sin. Thus he was saved. And now he clings to Him and trusts in Him, serving Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

In spite of great individual differences, the experiences of these men exhibit a number of common features, which constitute a type

¹ Translation of J. H. C. Cordes, in *English Hymn-Book with Tunes for Evangelical Lutheran Churches* (Tranquebar, 1868).

quite different from that of Tagore. An exhaustive analysis of these experiences is outside the scope of this book. A brief summary of the most outstanding features of this biblical type of religious experience will suffice for our purpose.

The first outstanding feature in all these experiences is the strong sense of the reality and the presence of the living God. There is no uncertainty or vagueness in this respect. The experience of God's reality is so overwhelming as to leave no room for any doubt or any escape. Secondly, this presence is a holy presence, causing an almost crushing consciousness of sin and guilt, which is so great and so strong that it threatens to drive the soul into despair. But upon repentance and the confession of sins there will follow an experience of the forgiveness of sins—this is the third feature—an assurance of God's mercy and love. And this, fourthly, will fill the heart with ineffable peace and joy. A fifth feature is the feeling of being called to a new task, a new life, consecrated to the service of the Lord. I do not overlook the fact that within the realm of Christendom there are many varieties of religious experiences, the most notable being that of gradual and sudden conversions.¹ It may also be that in one case one moment is more emphasised than another. But sooner or later all these elements will come to light in the Christian experience. They may therefore be said to constitute the Christian type.

In Tagore's experience we note that God is almost absent. In His stead there is the world, the universe. 'I could see the world in its own true aspect.' 'All of a sudden a covering seemed to fall away from my eyes, and I found the world bathed in a wonderful radiance, with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side.' In *Reminiscences* he sums up the significance of the whole experience in a couplet:

I know not how of a sudden my heart flung open its doors,
And let the crowd of worlds rush in, greeting each other.²

It may be argued that Tagore felt the divine presence in the universe. This is true, and later he developed this immanentist view into a kind of theistic humanism. But this feature is not dominant in his basic religious experiences.

¹ Cf. W. James: *Varieties of Religious Experience*; and S. E. Underwood *Conversion, Christian and Non-Christian*.

² *Reminiscences*, 220.

Certainly, there is also a dim sense of a 'Being', 'seeking his best expression in all my experiences'.¹ But Professor Sarma rightly points out that this 'Being' is not exactly God,² for Tagore identifies it with the idea of his *Jiban Debata*,³ which is not identical with God. We will return later to this question. If we compare this with the overwhelming feeling of God's reality and presence in the Christian experience, the difference is glaring.

Because God is absent the consciousness of sin and guilt is also absent. There is nothing of the almost crushing feeling of offence against the holy God, which is so characteristic of the Christian experience. In its stead there is a consciousness of the 'self' being 'rampant' in regard to the world. The evening had 'obliterated' the self, and the result was that the poet 'could see the world in its own true aspect'. This obliterating of the self, apparently, means a disinterested viewing of the world 'as a mere spectator', which is 'rewarded with the sense of special pleasure'.

Consequently, there is no experience of the forgiveness of sins and its peace. But there is 'the removal of the invisible screen of the common-place', the 'uplifting of the cover of triviality from the everyday world', and the feeling of joy over the world's beauty, 'swelling on every side'. This is a typically aesthetical experience. The religious element in it is represented by the sense of 'a luminous unity of truth'. And there is an intensification of 'the ultimate significance of things and men'. But this is something quite different from the peace of God, of which the Christian experience speaks as a gift accompanying forgiveness of sins and fellowship with God.

There is also a new relationship to the world, a new sense of unity with the world, a new way of viewing things and men. But in this new insight there is more of an aesthetical than of a religious touch. 'It came to be so that no person or thing in the world seemed to me trivial or unpleasing.'⁴ 'I had never before marked the play of limbs and lineaments which always accompanies even the least of men's actions; now I was spellbound by their variety, which I came across on all sides, at every moment. Yet I saw them not as being apart by themselves, but as parts of that amazingly beautiful greater dance

¹ *The Religion of Man*, 96.

² D. S. Sarma: *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, 361.

³ *The Religion of Man*, 97.

⁴ *Reminiscences*, 218.

which goes on at this very moment throughout the world of men, in each of their homes, in their multifarious wants and activities.¹

Instead of an ethico-religious experience, the dominant feature of which is the overwhelming consciousness of the holy presence of the living God, condemning sin and forgiving the repentant one his sin, admitting him into His holy fellowship and entrusting him with a new marvellous task, we have got here an aesthetico-religious experience, in which a new aesthetical relationship to the world is the dominant feature. The religious element is not missing, but it is not dominant.

The implications of these differences we shall have to study more in detail in the following chapters, but already here one remark must be made. It should by no means be denied that beauty can serve as a way of approach to true religion. Everything that is truly beautiful comes from God. The beauty of nature, according to the Bible, is a part of God's self-revelation. It is therefore needless to point out that joy in the beauty and majesty of nature is by no means alien to the Christian faith. On the contrary, Christian hymn-writing is full of it. But to lay the main emphasis on this and to satisfy oneself that this is enough seems to me to be like dwelling in the outer courts of the temple, forgetting to enter the sanctuary.² Such an attitude can easily become a substitute for true religion.

¹ *Ib.*, 219 f.

² A philosophical question of great interest in this connection is that of the relation of the aesthetical to the religious. How is an aesthetical experience related to a religious experience? Tagore, as we have seen, identified them. This, undoubtedly, is a mistake. Aestheticism and religion are different forms of experience. They have something in common, but they are not identical. Anders Nygren, in his *Religiöst Apriori*, has made an interesting analysis of the transcendental categories (in the sense of Kant) of the intellectual, aesthetical, ethical and religious experiences and their inter-relationships. He has shown, with the help of the Kantian transcendental method of analysis, that each kind of these experiences has its own transcendental category. But whereas the intellectual, aesthetical and ethical categories can be co-ordinated, it is not so with the religious category, the category of eternity, which underlies the other three as their basis. This will imply that along the line of each one of the three first-mentioned experiences there can be an approach to religion, but they can never be identified with it. If we satisfy ourselves with one—or even with all three of them—we shall come no further than to the threshold of true religion. William Temple, though with the help of a quite different method of analysis, comes to a similar conclusion, *viz.*, that intellect, art and morals never reach their goal, but suggest a goal which is reached in religion (*Mens Creatrix*, 255 ff.).

III

TAGORE'S VIEW OF THE WORLD

One of the most striking features of Tagore's religious experience was the great role the world played in it: 'I know not how of a sudden my heart flung open its doors, and let the crowd of worlds rush in, greeting each other.'¹

Everyone who has the slightest acquaintance with Tagore's poetry will know how dominant a place nature occupies there. His delight in this 'sun-kissed world' and all that is in it, its dark forests, its streams and torrents and lakes, its pattering rain, its moon-lit nights, its multifarious forms of life, the green trees and smiling flowers, the cattle grazing on the slope by the river, the shepherd playing his pipe beneath the banyan tree, the children merrily singing and dancing in the grove—this we meet on almost every page of his poetry.

I have kissed this world with my eyes and my limbs; I have wrapped it within my heart in numberless folds; I have flooded its days and nights with thoughts till the world and my life have grown one,—and I love my life because I love the light of the sky so enwoven with me.²

This love for nature, apparently, was innate in him and came to light very early. 'I remember,' he says, 'when I was a child, that a row of cocoanut trees by our garden wall, with their branches beckoning the rising sun on the horizon, gave me a companionship as living as I was myself.'³ In *Reminiscences* he tells of the inner garden of the Tagore house, 'Jorasanko', in Calcutta, a garden which was poor enough, consisting only of a citron tree, a couple of plum trees and a row of cocoanut trees. None the less, this 'Jorasanko' garden was a paradise to little Rabindranath, the adornment of which could well match that of Adam's garden of Eden.⁴

Tagore remembered throughout his life how he used to run there as soon as he was awake in the early morning. A scent of dewy grass and foliage would rush to meet him, and the morning, with all its cool, fresh sunlight, would peep out at him over the top of the

¹ See above, p. 53.

² *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 53.

³ *Creative Unity*, 8.

⁴ *Reminiscences*, 18.

Eastern garden wall, from below the trembling tassels of the cocoanut palms.¹

When, in his twelfth year, for the first time, in the company of his father, he visited Santiniketan, arriving at Bolpur in the evening, he closed his eyes, when he got into the palanquin which was to take him from the railway station to the *āshram*; for he wanted to preserve the whole of the wonderful scenery to be unfolded before his waking eyes in the morning light; he feared that the freshness of the experience would be spoilt by incomplete glimpses caught in the vagueness of the evening dusk.²

From his boyhood the wooded banks of the Ganges filled his heart with ineffable joy: 'This Bengal sky full of light, this south breeze, this flow of the river, this right royal laziness, this broad leisure stretching from horizon to horizon and from green earth to blue sky, all these were to me as food and drink to the hungry and thirsty. Here it felt indeed like home, and in these I recognised the ministrations of a Mother.'³

When in his later years he found that big factories for making gunny-bags had been built on both banks of the river near Calcutta, this 'ruthless intrusion' shocked him with a sense of personal injury.⁴ He did not like the big, greedy city, shamelessly extending its dirty tentacles over the peaceful surroundings of the holy river. 'Calcutta', he says, 'is an upstart town with no depth of sentiment in her face and in her manners. It may truly be said about her genius: In the beginning there was the spirit of the shop, which uttered through its megaphone, "Let there be the Office! and there was Calcutta".'⁵ But then—'What about gunny-bags?' Tagore would admit that they are indispensable, and he was willing to allow them a place in society, if only his opponent would admit that 'even gunny-bags should have their limits'.⁶

In Tagore's opinion there are two ways of establishing relationships with the universe: either by conquest or by union, either through the cultivation of power, or through that of sympathy. When we know this world as alien to us, then its mechanical aspect takes prominence in our mind; and then we set up our machines and our methods to deal with it and make as much profit as our

¹ *Reminiscences*, 18.

² *Ib.*, 80.

³ *Ib.*, 208.

⁴ *Creative Unity*, 115.

⁵ *Ib.*, 116. Cf. *The Religion of Man*, 167 f.

⁶ *Creative Unity*, 117.

knowledge of its mechanism allows us to do. This view of things does not play us false, for the machine has its place in this world, but it is not the highest aspect, not the ultimate truth of the universe. The highest purpose of this world is not merely living in it, knowing it and making use of it, but realising our own selves in it through expansion of sympathy; not alienating ourselves from it and dominating it, but comprehending and uniting it with ourselves in perfect union. The perfect relation with this world is the relation of union.¹

This is the message of the Indian forest-dwellers, says Tagore.² Whereas European civilization was nurtured within city walls, separating man from nature, the birth of Indian culture took place in a land of vast forests. This difference, in Tagore's opinion, has left its mark upon the civilizations of the East and the West, in so much as the spirit of the West is that of subduing nature and making it yield its treasures to the needs of man, whereas India put all her emphasis on the harmony that exists between man and the universe.³

Tagore had a great admiration for the forest colonies of ancient India. Apparently this was partly due to the unimaginative and little attractive face of the city where he was born and brought up. His eldest brother roused his imagination by the description of a lost society, 'hospitable, sweet with old-world aroma of natural kindness, full of simple faith and the ceremonial poetry of life'.⁴ Time and again in his essays and discourses Tagore returns to the history of the forest colonies of ancient India, their practices, their ideals of life and their importance as formative factors of Indian culture.⁵ The forest-dweller of ancient India was a seeker after truth, for the sake of which he lived in 'an atmosphere of purity but not of Puritanism, of a simple life but not a life of self-mortification'.⁶ 'Having been in constant contact with the living growth of nature, his mind was free from desire to extend his dominion

¹ *Ib.*, 45 f.; *Sādhana*, 3 ff.

² *Creative Unity*, 46. In *Creative Unity* (46 f.), the conquering character of the spirit of the West is derived from the sea and its constant war with the land everywhere in the fissured coasts of Europe. 'The sea was the challenge of untamed nature to the indomitable human soul. And man did not flinch; he fought and won, and the spirit of fight continued in him.'

³ *Sādhana*, 3 ff.

⁴ *Religion of Man*, 117 f.

⁵ *Sādhana*, 3; *Personality*, 127; *The Religion of Man*, 167.

⁶ *The Religion of Man*, 167.

by creating boundary walls around his acquisitions. His aim was not to acquire but to realise, to enlarge his consciousness by growing with and growing into his surroundings.'¹

There can be little doubt that this picture of ancient India is an anachronism. 'It is a poetical, not a historical picture', says Professor H. Hjärne, 'that Tagore here reveals to us, to confirm his promise that a peace awaiteth us too; by virtue of the right attaching to the gifts of prophecy he makes free to lay the scenes that have loomed before his creative vision at a period contemporary with the beginnings of Time.'²

This may be true. And it should also be pointed out that the catastrophe of the West was not caused merely by its yearnings after material conquest, but still more by an untamed and ruthless nationalism, which put the nation in the place of God, regarding any means sanctified if only they served the glory of the nation. In this respect India would do well to heed the warning of the tragedy of the West. This in no way, however, diminishes the significance and the weight of Tagore's plea to the West for a less materialistic and a more spiritual way of life. This plea is in full agreement with true Christian preaching.

Man's efforts to acquire his necessities from nature, Tagore would admit, are not wrong, neither are they in vain, for he is reaping success every day, and this shows that there is a rational connection between him and nature. But it is one-sided, and it must not be allowed to infringe upon that deeper relation between nature and man which is its real and ultimate meaning. There is a real kinship between nature and man. To look upon inanimate things and beasts as something alien to human nature, making 'a sudden unaccountable break where human nature begins', is like dividing the bud and the blossom into two separate categories, and putting their grace to the credit of two different and antithetical principles.³

Tagore firmly believed in the theory of evolution. That all higher forms of life have developed from lower ones, without any 'sudden unaccountable break', was to him an established and unshakable faith. *The Religion of Man* opens with a grand hymn to 'the march of evolution ever unfolding the potentialities of life'.⁴ And in *Gitanjali* we meet it again and again.

¹ *Sādhana*, 4.

² *Sādhana*, 6 f.

³ *Le prix Nobel*, 1913, 40.

⁴ *The Religion of Man*, 13 f.

The stream of life that runs through my veins
 night and day runs through the world
 and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy
 through the dust of the earth
 in numberless blades of grass and breaks
 into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked
 in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death,
 in ebb and in flow.

I feel my limbs are made glorious
 by the touch of this world of life.
 And my pride is from the life-throb of ages
 dancing in my blood this moment.¹

Not only within the realm of life, but also between inert nature and life, there is an unbroken inner unity. Hence there exists an inner relationship between man and the entire universe. 'The world and the personal man are face to face, like friends who question one another and exchange their inner secrets. The world asks the inner man,—Friend, have you seen me? Do you love me?—not as one who provides you with food and fruits, not as one whose laws you have found out, but as one who is personal, individual?'²

I often wonder where lie hidden
 the boundaries of recognition
 between man and the beast whose heart
 knows no spoken language.

Through what primal paradise
 in a remote morning of creation
 ran the simple path by which their hearts
 visited each other.

Those marks of their constant tread
 have not been effaced though their kinship
 has been long forgotten.

¹ *Gitanjali*, no. 69.

² *Personality*, 22.

Yet suddenly in some wordless music
the dim memory wakes up and the beast gazes
into the man's face with a tender trust,
and the man looks down into its eyes
with amused affection.

It seems that the two friends meet masked,
and vaguely know each other
through the disguise.¹

The 'inner secrets' which the world and man exchange are these, that the ultimate truth of man as well as of the universe is personality, and that all individual personalities are comprised in one Supreme Personality. The man who has his spiritual eyes open knows that the ultimate truth about earth and water lies in our apprehension of the eternal will which works in time and takes shape in the forces we realise under those aspects. This is not the mere knowledge of science—the scientist also knows that the world is not merely what it appears to be to our senses; but such knowledge is different from spiritual knowledge, which is a perception of the soul by the soul. This knowledge does not lead man to power, as does science, but it gives him joy, which is the product of the union of kindred things. For 'our delight is in realising ourselves outside us'.² When we recognise ourselves in others we are glad.

The man of this spiritual vision finds more than nature in natural phenomena. The water does not merely cleanse his limbs, but it purifies his heart, for it touches his soul; the earth does not merely hold his body, but it gladdens his mind, for its contact is more than a physical contact—it is a living presence. He meets the eternal spirit in all objects.³

A handful of dust could hide your signal
when I did not know its meaning.

Now that I am wiser I read it in all
that hid it before.

It is painted in patterns of flowers;
waves flash it from their foam;
hills hold it high on their summits.

¹ *The Gardener*, no. 79.

² *Personality*, 67 f.; *Sādhanā*, 28.

³ *Sādhanā*, 8.

I had my face turned from you,
therefore I read the letters awry
and knew not their meaning.¹

This kinship makes him feel at home in the world, which otherwise would be a veritable prison-house to him. 'I know that I am not a mere stranger resting in the wayside inn of this earth on my voyage of existence, but I live in a world whose life is bound up with mine.'²

The poet rejoiced when he saw a little girl 'from the West country' take up her brother in one arm and a lamb in the other, 'and dividing her caresses between them bound in one bond of affection the offspring of beast and man',³ or when he heard from the riverside a voice calling, 'Come, my darling!' and, looking out of his window, saw a big buffalo with mud-stained hide standing near the river with placid, patient eyes, and a youth knee-deep in water, calling it to its bath. 'I smiled amused and felt a touch of sweetness in my heart.'⁴

It is the realisation of this kinship that gives to the world its beauty. The spiritual man is the artist, who gives to the question of the world: Have you seen me? his answer: Yes, I have seen you, I have loved you and known you. I see you, where you are what I am.⁵

The great mystery of the relation of the human heart with nature is illustrated in the beauty of a flower. Seen from without, it is one of the innumerable workmen in the great workshop of nature, burdened with the hard task of bringing forth fruit for the continuity of the life of its species. Its exquisite petals, its bright colours, its sweet perfume, are all suited to that work, and science, viewing the flower from without, can find no other meaning in it. But when this same flower enters the heart of men its aspect of busy practicality is gone, and it becomes the very emblem of leisure and repose. 'In the sphere of nature the flower carries with it a certificate which recommends it as having immense capacity for doing useful work, but it brings an altogether different letter of introduction when it knocks at the door of our hearts. Beauty becomes its only qualification . . . In nature its work is that of a servant who has to make his appearance at

¹ *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 5.

² *Personality*, 74; cf. *Gitanjali*, no. 95.

³ *The Gardener*, no. 77.

⁴ *Ib.*, no. 78.

⁵ *Personality*, 22.

appointed times, but in the heart of man it comes like a messenger from the King.¹

'The King's message' can be read in all nature:

The rustling leaves will read it aloud to me,
the rushing stream will chant it,
and the seven wise stars will sing it to me from the sky.²

'The earth,' says E. J. Thompson, 'has never known a son more filial or one who has knelt to her in a more worshipping wise; and this is because he knows that he is breath of her breath, bone of her bone, in soul and mind and memory no less than in body.'³ To Tagore the life of the universe, in all its phases and forms, is filled with the life of his own life, and this is the life of the Infinite, and therefore he loves it.

In this playhouse of infinite forms I have had my play
and here have I caught sight of him that is formless.⁴

Yes, I know, this is nothing but thy love,
O beloved of my heart—
this golden light that dances upon the leaves,
these idle clouds sailing across the sky,
this passing breeze leaving its coolness upon my forehead.

The morning light has flooded my eyes—
this is thy message to my heart.
Thy face is bent from above,
thy eyes look down on my eyes,
and my heart has touched thy feet.⁵

According to D. S. Sarma, no Indian poet since the Vedic times has felt so intensely the presence of God behind the phenomena of nature, and, in his opinion, it is just in this nature-mysticism that we have to seek the originality of Tagore.⁶ 'Here he breaks what is practically new ground in our religious literature.'⁷

This statement, at first sight, is startling. For is not this nature-mysticism the very core of the teachings of the Upanishads: the

¹ *Sādhana*, 101.

² *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 4.

³ E. J. Thompson: *Rabindranath Tagore, his Life and Work*, 76.

⁴ *Gitanjali*, no. 96.

⁵ *Ib.*, no. 52.

⁶⁻⁷ D. S. Sarma: *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, 396.

kinship, or rather the identity, of the spirit of man and that of the universe? *Ātma* and *Brāhma* are one. Tagore repeatedly refers to sayings of the Upanishads. And do we not meet it in some strata of the *Gīta*, which undoubtedly have some doctrines in common with the Upanishads? 'Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, understanding and self-consciousness—such is the eight-fold division of my nature. . . . All this is strung on me as rows of gems on a string. I am the taste in the water, O Arjuna. I am the light in the sun and the moon. I am the syllable Om in all the Vedas. I am the sound in ether and manliness in men. I am the pure fragrance in the earth, and the brightness in the fire. I am the life in all creatures, and the austerity in ascetics. Know me to be the eternal seed, O Arjuna, of all things that are. I am the wisdom of the wise, and I am the glory of the glorious.'¹

Certainly, Tagore is, to a certain extent, in accordance with the doctrines of the Upanishads and the *Gīta* when he rejoices in the kinship between the spirit in all things and his own soul and the infinite spirit in the universe. Yet there is a vast difference between the teachings of the Upanishads and that of Tagore. The identity of *Brāhma* and *Ātma* in the teachings of the Upanishads is not learnt from nature. There are, as D. S. Sarma points out, a few hints of it, but they are lost sight of in later scriptures.² And even in the *Gīta* it appears only 'in the form of a hardened doctrine, the doctrine of divine immanence'.³

In the Upanishads and in the *Gīta* we do not find this passionate love for nature and this joy in the life of the world, which are such characteristic features of Tagore's piety. We have to go to Kālidāsa in order to find a poet in whom the love of nature is so dominant a feature as in Tagore. Obviously Kālidāsa's love for nature and his longing admiration for the *tapovāna*, the forest colony, have made a deep impression on Tagore. More than once in his writings he refers to Kālidāsa,⁴ and in *The Religion of Man* he confesses that 'a poet of modern India had a similar vision'.⁵

In spite of vast differences it is evident that these two poets had much in common. Yet, all this admitted, it must not be overlooked

¹ D. S. Sarma: *The Bhāgavadgīta*, 7: 4-10.

²⁻³ D. S. Sarma: *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, 396.

⁴ *The Religion of Man*, 166 f.; *Creative Unity*, 49 ff.

⁵ *The Religion of Man*, 168.

that, at the decisive point, the similarity breaks down; the religious element is absent in Kālidāsa's love of nature. 'Even the great Kālidāsa,' says D. S. Sarma,¹ 'with all his intense love and accurate knowledge of mountains, trees and flowers, had no *religious* feeling for Nature. He had sympathetic insight into Nature, he interfused the workings of Nature with human feelings, but he did not have a vision of the universal spirit behind Nature. He sang of the harmony between man and Nature, not of man's realization of God through Nature.' Professor Sarma finds it 'strange that in a country, where the Vedas themselves arose out of a passionate feeling for the glories of Nature, this type of poetry should have receded into the background'.

It is strange, indeed, that the seers of the Upanishads, with all their joy in the unity they discovered of the spirit in man and the universal spirit, did not reach out beyond a few poor hints to a divine self-revelation through the universe; and it is also strange that Kālidāsa, with all his love for nature, could not rise to a religious view of it. Apparently there must have been strong forces in operation, hindering such a development.

It is not difficult to detect these forces. The two dominant doctrines of traditional Hinduism are those of *māyā*, illusion, and *karma*, equivalent retribution for works in *samsāra*, the transmigration of souls. The beginnings of these doctrines are already found in the Upanishads, and in subsequent Hinduism their sway has been constantly increasing. But these doctrines, each in its own way, prevent a really religious love of nature. For how can there be any really religious aspect of nature at all, if the world is a mere illusion caused by *avidya*, ignorance, and how can there be a real love for nature if all things are looked upon as elements in the terrifying wheel of *samsāra*? It is quite consistent with these doctrines when some of the Upanishads recommend *pratyāshāra*, the shutting of the doors of the five senses, in order not to be deceived by the things in the world. Even the *Bhāgavadgītā* gives the advice: 'When a man withdraws his senses from their objects on every side, as a tortoise does its limbs, then is his wisdom firmly set.'²

A religious view of nature, and love for it, can combine only if

¹ *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, 396.

² *Bhāgavadgītā* 2: 58. Cf. *Chāndogya Up.* 8: 15; *Kātha Up.* 3: 13; *Maitreya Up.* 6: 19, 25; etc.

these doctrines lose their grip of the heart. This is what has happened in the case of Tagore. He felt free to take from the Upanishads just as much as was in agreement with his own standpoint. He took a few isolated ideas, like that of the unity of the human and the universal soul, leaving out all those which did not suit him. For the doctrine of *māyā*, which makes this world unreal, and those of *samsāra* and *karma*, which make the world and life in it a punishment for sin, Tagore's mind, steeped in Western education and culture, had no use. Therefore the 'passionate feeling for the glories of nature' which is found in the oldest strata of the Vedas, and the belief in the affinity of the human with the universal spirit, could combine and emerge into the nature-mysticism which we find in his poetry.

Western culture has rendered Tagore the service of relieving his mind from the burden of the doctrines of *māyā*, *samsāra* and *karma*, thereby removing the hindrance to the combination of love for nature and the religious aspect of it. Is there any positive relationship between Western culture and Tagore's nature-mysticism?

In the classical English literature (that of Shakespeare, Milton, etc.), according to Tagore's own testimony, he did not find this mystical aspect of nature. The beauty of nature was not ignored by these poets, but he missed in them 'the truth of interpenetration of human life with the cosmic life of the world'.¹ It is otherwise with later English poets, like Wordsworth and Shelley. Undoubtedly there is a kinship between these poets and Tagore. Almost all of his biographers are aware of this fact. 'The young Tagore was honoured with the cognomen of 'the Bengal Shelley'. 'This was insulting to Shelley and only likely to get me laughed at', he says modestly.² But he himself was aware of his indebtedness to these poets, and in his writings we find references to them now and then.³ The kinship of poets of this type to his own poetry, however, he attributed to the influence of Indian philosophy on Western thought.⁴

It is a well-known fact that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the newly-discovered religious literature of India had a certain influence on philosophers and poets in the West, especially so

¹ *Creative Unity*, 61. He seems not to have been aware of Traherne, the mystic of seventeenth-century England, who was discovered at the beginning of this century, and whose nature-mysticism in many respects resembles that of Tagore.

² *Reminiscences*, 249.

³ *Creative Unity*, 14, 18 ff., 61; *The Religion of Man*, 113, etc.

⁴ *Creative Unity*, 61.

in Germany. In the poetry of Friedrich Schlegel, in the philosophy of Friedrich Schelling, and above all in the thought of Arthur Schopenhauer, we meet it, and maybe also in the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher, the friend of Schlegel. Dr. H. R. Mackintosh sums up the theology of the *Addresses* of Schleiermacher in this way: 'If a man awakes to the fact that within this single life the Whole is living, that in his personal existence there is beating vividly, vitally, the pulse of the Infinite movement, then in that man, Schleiermacher teaches, authentic piety is born.'¹ There is no indication that Mackintosh is aware of any Indian influence on Schleiermacher, but this summary could just as well be a description of Tagore's conception of religion. It is an interesting testimony to the fact that an aesthetic conception of life, starting from contemplation of the universe, will result in the same conception of religion, in the East as well as in the West.

It would be a rash conclusion to assume that this agreement is due merely to direct Indian influence on the West. Through Western Christianity there runs a stream of mysticism. It is not of Christian, but of Greek origin. Neoplatonism, the last important fruit of Greek philosophy and religion, itself strongly influenced by Christianity, found its way into the Christian Church and was merged into Christian piety. It entered mainly through two portals: St. Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. In the theology of the former the Neoplatonic elements and the Christian faith were brought to a real synthesis, whereas in the latter the Neoplatonic philosophy is only scantily disguised with Christian terms.² Both these streams flowed into the Church of the Middle Ages. In medieval mysticism, therefore, we can discern two different lines, the one more Christian and less Greek, leading through St. Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Francis of Assisi, Thomas à Kempis, Heinrich Suso, Johann Tauler, St. Theresa, etc.; the other one, more Greek and less Christian, leading through 'Dionysius' into the Eastern Church, but through Scotus Erigena and Meister Eckhart influencing also the Church of the West.³

¹ H. R. Mackintosh: *Types of Modern Theology*, 52.

² A. Nygren: *Agape and Eros* (Eng. tr.), II. 233 f., 358 f.

³ It is an open question whether Greek mysticism (Orphism, Platonism, Neoplatonism, etc.) was influenced by Indian thought. This view, which is held by some scholars (cf. S. Radhakrishnan: *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, 133 ff.), has much that tells in its favour. It shows how complicated the question of spiritual influences is.

The Reformers signify a return to biblical faith, but the mysticism of the Middle Ages, along many different avenues, made its reappearance in Evangelical Christendom. It came to light in many different connections. We find it in the piety of the 'enthusiasts' of the Reformation time, in the devotional literature of the Lutheran orthodoxy and the English 'Free Church' movements in the seventeenth century, in the speculations of Jacob Boehme, in the philosophy of Benedictus Spinoza, and also in the religious life of Pietism and Herrnhutism in Germany. The Romanticism of the nineteenth century, with its emphasis on emotion, imagination and intuition, consciously sought inspiration in medieval mysticism.

To the stream of the spiritual life of Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century there were many tributaries. Schelling, Schlegel and their friends had learned from the nature-mysticism of Jacob Boehme, the identity-philosophy of Benedictus Spinoza and medieval mysticism. The pantheistic and mystical features in their thinking and poetry, without any doubt, to a large extent, are due to influences from these sources.

This, in a still higher degree, may be the case with an English poet like Shelley, who surely was much less acquainted with Indian philosophy than were the Germans, but who admittedly was greatly influenced by the identity-philosophy and mysticism of Spinoza. The Eastern influence on Western thought is visible in other respects, as, *e.g.*, in Schopenhauer's pessimism, but the nature-mysticism of these Western poets can hardly be derived from Indian influences, for the simple reason that, if Professor Sarma is right, it is not to be found in Hindu literature.

It is not our business here to analyse the nature-mysticism in Western poetry. Here we are concerned with the religious aspect of nature in the Christian faith. It must not be forgotten that Western Christianity is by no means devoid of a religious outlook on nature. How could it be, since the Bible is full of it, especially the Old Testament? Everyone who is familiar with the poetical parts of the Old Testament knows how great a role nature as a revelation of the Almighty plays in them. 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein', says a psalmist.¹

¹ Ps. 24: 1.

And in another psalm we read:

The heavens declare the glory of God;
 And the firmament sheweth his handywork.
 Day unto day uttereth speech,
 And night unto night sheweth knowledge.
 There is no speech nor language;
 Their voice cannot be heard.
 Their line is gone out through all the earth,
 And their words to the end of the world.

And in another psalm again:

Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to
 rejoice.
 Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it,
 Thou greatly enrichest it;
 The river of God is full of water:
 Thou providest them corn, when thou hast so prepared
 the earth.
 Thou waterest her furrows abundantly;
 Thou settlest the ridges thereof:
 Thou makest it soft with showers;
 Thou blessest the springing thereof.
 Thou crownest the year with thy goodness;
 And thy paths drop fatness.
 They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness:
 And the hills are girded with joy.
 The pastures are clothed with flocks;
 The valleys also are covered over with corn;
 They shout for joy, they also sing.¹

And in the book of Job it is said:

Remember that thou magnify his work,
 Whereof men have sung.²

In chapter after chapter of that book is sung the praise of the mercy and glory and majesty of the Lord as revealed in nature: in the lightning and the thunderstorm, in the clouds and the rains, in the snow and the ice and the drops of the dew, in the cluster of the Pleiades and the bonds of Orion, in the tender grass of the meadows and the bareness of the wilderness and the desolate ground.³

¹ Ps. 19: 1-4; 65: 8-13.

² Job 36: 24.

³ Job 38 ff.

In the New Testament also we find it in the teaching of our Lord, who looked with such tender eyes upon the birds of the heaven and the lilies of the field, which were included in the merciful care of His heavenly Father.¹ And to St. Paul it was self-evident that 'the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity', and that 'he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness'.²

Because it is found in the Bible, we shall find this religious aspect of nature also in Christian hymn-writing. For various reasons the eyes of Western Christendom have at times been almost closed to the beauties of nature and the religious aspect of the universe, but time and again this element in the Bible has greatly inspired Christian poetry. One of the first and loveliest in this respect was St. Francis of Assisi, whose love for every creature and for all things in this world of ours made him praise and glorify the Most High for 'brother Sun' and 'sister Moon and all the stars', for 'brother Wind' and 'sister Water', for 'mother Earth with all her grass and flowers and fruits'. To take an example from Protestant Christendom it will suffice to mention Thomas Traherne, whose *Centuries of Meditation* reveal a deep sense of the divine revelation in nature.³ And Christian hymn-writing in all countries has given most beautiful expressions to this aspect of the faith. Any church hymnal will give sufficient evidence of that. Choosing one at random, I take as an example the Bombay governor, Sir Robert Grant's, hymn to the Creator:

O worship the King, all-glorious above;
O gratefully sing His power and His love;
Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendour, and girded with praise.

O tell of His might, O sing of His grace,
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,
And dark is His path on the wings of the storm.

¹ Matt. 6: 26 ff.

² Rom. 1: 20; Acts 14: 17.

³ See above, p. 66.

The earth, with its store of wonders untold,
 Almighty, Thy power hath founded of old,
 Hath stablished it fast by a changeless decree,
 And round it hath cast, like a mantle, the sea.

Thy bountiful care what tongue can recite?
 It breathes in the air, it shines in the light,
 It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
 And sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
 In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail;
 Thy mercies how tender! How firm to the end!
 Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.

O measureless Might! ineffable Love!
 While angels delight to hymn Thee above,
 The humbler creation, though feeble their lays,
 With true adoration shall lisp to Thy praise.

A study of the Bible and the poetry and hymn-writing inspired by the Bible will leave us in no doubt on this point. In the beauty and the wonders of nature the Christian faith finds a revelation of God. The Creator of the universe has left His imprints on His creation. 'On all His works He has inscribed His glory', says Calvin in his *Institutes*.¹ And in the maintenance of the world and all that lives in it the Christian faith is able to trace the love and the mercy of God the Father Almighty.

The religious aspect of nature is common to the Christian faith and the religion of Tagore. But it must immediately be added that there is a great and significant difference between the Christian aspect of the universe and the nature-mysticism of Tagore. In the Bible and in Christian hymn-writing we meet the praise and the worship of the power and wisdom and majesty of the Almighty as revealed in the wonders of nature, and joy and trust in the glory and love of the transcendent Lord stooping down to His creation in tender and merciful care, which is extended even to the meanest of His creatures. In Tagore's poetry we find joy over the all-pervading Life, which 'runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures'.²

Tagore's nature-mysticism is composed of different strands.

¹ Ch. 1: 5.

² *Gitanjali*, no. 69.

First of all it is a product of his own creative and formative poetical spirit, which was utterly sensitive to beauty. But various strands of external influence are also traceable. There is the Upanishadic doctrine of the unity of the human and the universal soul. This alone, as we saw, cannot produce a nature-mysticism. But Tagore's aesthetical genius combined it with Kālidāsa's love for nature. This combination was made possible through the removal of the traditional Hindu doctrines of *māyā*, *samsāra* and *karma*, which prevented a religious aspect of nature; and this removal, undoubtedly, was due to the Christian influence on modern Hinduism. Also the influence of English poets like Browning, Shelley and Wordsworth might have contributed something, but direct Christian influence in this respect is not likely.

We have just pointed out the vast difference between the biblical-religious aspect of the universe and Tagore's nature-mysticism. This difference has wider and deeper implications, which must be briefly examined. Especially, we must look into its consequences in regard to the relation between man and nature, between man and God, and between God and nature.

If the kinship between nature and man is as close as is supposed by Tagore, the question arises: What becomes of the uniqueness of man? According to Tagore there is no 'sudden unaccountable break where human nature begins'.¹ Inanimate and animal nature, on the one hand, and human nature on the other, are like the bud and the blossom.² In this way, evidently man is made a part of nature and nothing more. As we shall see later, Tagore is not able to maintain this view consistently. No wonder, for it is to assign too little to human nature. According to the Bible man is a unique creation. This is presupposed in both the Old and the New Testaments. In one respect, as far as his body and mind are concerned, he is certainly part and parcel of nature. So far Tagore is perfectly right. But there is something in man which is not found in the rest of creation; there is something more, which definitely distinguishes him from the inanimate and animal world. He is created 'in the image of God'.³ What is meant by this enigmatic expression we shall have to discuss at a later stage of our investigation. Here it will suffice to say that it is in 'the image of God' that we have to seek what is characteristically human, what makes him man.

¹⁻² *Sādhanā*, 6 f.

³ Gen. 1: 27.

Tagore's idea of an unbroken unity will also have its effect at the other end of the problem of man: on his relation to God. For, as there is no 'sudden and unaccountable break' between nature and man, there is no such break between man and God either. There is unbroken unity from beginning to end. This, on the other hand, is to assign too much to man. In this way he is made divine. But according to biblical teaching he is a created being; to be sure, a unique creation, created in the image of God; yet a creature, not a divine being.

If we conceive of man as divine, this will have a bearing on our conception of God too; for then the corollary is that God is human, and thereby His holiness is seriously impaired. This is seen even more clearly in the relation ascribed to God in regard to nature. Tagore 'meets the eternal spirit in all objects'.¹ It is not the *tat*, 'it', of the Upanishads, not the impersonal *Brāhma* of Vedāntism. The eternal spirit is personal, he is 'the Supreme Person'.² Tagore's entire philosophy centres in the idea of personality. Only in relation to a person has the world any reality to him. The forms of things and their changes have no absolute reality. 'Their truth dwells in our personality.'³ It is our mind and its movements that make them what they are to us. Our world, therefore, is the creation of our mind. Yet it is not arbitrary. It is universal. For it is not in the individual personalities alone that the reality of the world is contained, but in a universal, infinite personality.

The world of science, in Tagore's opinion, is not altogether untrue. It has some relation to the universe and to man and his needs, as is evidenced by the fact that man is reaping important fruits of the labour of science every day. Yet it is not the real world. It is a world of abstractions. The reality of the world we grasp only when our soul meets the universal soul that hides in everything. 'The prosody of the stars can be explained in the class-room by diagrams, but the poetry of the stars is in the silent meeting of soul with soul, at the confluence of the light and the dark, where the infinite prints its kiss on the forehead of the finite, where we can hear the music of the Great I Am pealing from the grand organ of creation through its countless reeds in endless harmony.'⁴

This is a charming view of the world. All its beauty is a reflection

¹ *Sādhana*, 8.
Personality, 58.

² *Ib.*, 17 f.; *Personality*, 69 f.

⁴ *Ib.*, 59.

of the joy and the goodness of the Supreme Person, who is closely immanent wheresoever it appears. The whole world is the self-expression of God. Ultimately it is the divine nature permeating all space and time, which is immanent wheresoever we recognise beauty and goodness.

Tagore is not alone in this view of the universe. It is shared by almost all idealistic philosophy, ancient and modern. The maintaining of it, however, has always had to contend with considerable difficulties. It should by no means be denied that the religious mind is able to see in all the beauty of the world the expression of God's goodness and love. But beauty is not the whole truth of the world. There are other, sterner facts, which cannot be overlooked. O. C. Quick, in his famous book *The Christian Sacraments*, sums up the fundamental objections to what he calls 'aesthetic sacramentalism', in two points: first, the 'positive' evil which is in actual conflict with the moral will; and, secondly, the incapacity of what occupies space and time for the embodiment of perfection.¹

His criticism of aesthetic sacramentalism is relevant also to Tagore's nature-mysticism. Beginning with the last point, we must state that an aesthetic view of life is incapable of permanently satisfying man's spiritual need. All the beauty of the world, natural as well as artistic, will at last leave our soul empty. 'Though nature and art and philosophy have taught us what beauty is,' says Quick, 'they cry with one voice: "It is not in us", as soon as we have learned their lesson.'² Because space and time reflect the divine mind only in a most imperfect way, we cannot be satisfied with a merely aesthetic view of life; it leads us only to the outer courts of the temple.

Moreover, the world not only expresses the love of God in a very imperfect way; it contains too many facts which directly contradict it. Not only is there the tremendous mass of suffering in the world; much worse is the existence of positive and active evil.

From such perplexities aesthetic religion can attempt two ways of escape. Either it may suppose that this imperfect world is not the real one, but that there exists behind and beyond the phenomena of this world another one of perfect beauty and goodness; or it may assume that the defects are due, not to the conditions of the world itself, but to our imperfect apprehension of it: if only we were able

¹ O. C. Quick: *The Christian Sacraments*, 38.

² *Ib.*, 36.

to see the whole, everything that now appears to conflict with goodness would be found to fit into its place and be justified in the total scheme. The first alternative is that generally resorted to by idealistic philosophy. This line of thought, however, will easily lead to the mysticism of the *via negativa*, which describes the one true and divine reality as altogether ineffable: it is *neti, neti*; it is 'not that, not that'.

If this explanation is rejected, there remains only the second alternative, *vis.*, to declare that it is only the finiteness of our vision that prevents us from seeing that the world, viewed as a whole, is mere beauty and goodness. The implication is that the conflict between good and evil, after all, is not real, and that good and evil are only imperfectly apprehended parts of the one true reality, which, seen as a whole, is perfectly beautiful and good.

This, as we shall see in a later chapter, is the way Tagore has chosen.¹ There are, however, serious objections to such a line of thought. The fundamental objection to such a solution of the problem is this, that it is conceived in terms which are too exclusively aesthetic. It fails, therefore, to satisfy the demands of our moral nature. It suggests that evil things are harmonised with goodness in the whole, in a manner analogous to that in which a discord is justified in a musical sequence. But this analogy offends our conscience.²

It is evident that in this way God's holiness is seriously impaired. Evil is falsely minimised and harmonised with God's will, and, in the last resort, attributed to Himself. This is the inevitable result of a monistic view of the universe. The biblical revelation gives a different picture of the world. Its outlook is not monistic but dualistic. The world is not what God meant it to be; it is damaged by evil forces. The Cross reveals this fact. But this Tagore fails to see.

Lastly, in this kind of nature-mysticism God is so intimately connected with the universe that the difference between the Creator and the creation is annihilated. Says Tagore: 'In India the greater part of our literature is religious, because God with us is not a distant God; He belongs to our home, as well as to our temples. We feel His nearness to us in all the human relationship of love and affection, and in our festivities He is the chief guest whom we honour. In seasons of flowers and fruits, in the coming of the rain,

¹ See below, chapter VII.

² Cf. Quick, *op. cit.*, 39.

in the fulness of the autumn, we see the hem of His mantle and hear His footsteps. We worship Him in all the true objects of our worship and love Him wherever our love is true. In the woman who is good we feel Him, in the man who is true we know Him, in our children He is born again and again, the Eternal Child.¹

In this passage there are said many beautiful things with which a Christian would whole-heartedly agree. For, in a Christian home also, God is the chief and most honoured guest; a Christian also will rejoice in seeing 'the hem of His mantle' and hearing 'His footsteps' 'in seasons of flowers and fruits, in the coming of the rain, in the fulness of the autumn'; a Christian also will thank God for 'the woman who is good', for 'the man who is true' and for the child that is born. He will praise God for all these things and thank Him for them as for good gifts of His grace. But he will not worship Him *in* them. That is a different attitude altogether. A true Christian would not be able to say that God is born again in his child. Once God was born as a Child, but this was a unique event, a wonder above all wonders, never repeated. To worship God in created things is to mistake the creature for the Creator, and this, according to the biblical revelation, is idolatry, even though it be in a refined and cultured form.

¹ *Personality*, 27f.

IV

TAGORE'S VIEW OF LIFE

Closely connected with Tagore's view of the universe is his view of life. It is definitely optimistic. A main feature of his basic religious experience was a strong feeling that life 'is full of beauty and joy'.¹ 'The King's message' is joy.² In a verse from the Upanishads Tagore sums up the inner meaning of nature: 'From joy are born all creatures, by joy they are sustained, towards joy they progress, and into joy they enter.'³

Tagore is a prophet of the joy of life. This is one of the most outstanding features of his poetry, as it was one of the most dominant elements in his religious experience that memorable morning in 'Jorasanko': 'The morning light on the face of the world revealed an inner radiance of joy', he says.⁴ This was to him evidence that 'somewhere in the arrangement of this world there seems to be a great concern about giving us delight'.⁵ It was also evidence that he had touched the ultimate truth of the universe. For Tagore was convinced that gladness is the one criterion of truth, and that 'we know when we have touched truth by the music it gives, by the joy of greeting it sends forth to the truth in us'.⁶ Joy, in his opinion, needs no reason for its existence; it is an end in itself. Therefore it is the final truth. 'For *satyam* is *ānandam*, the Real is Joy.'⁷ 'The beauty of nature is not a mirage of the imagination, but reflects the joy of the Infinite.'⁸ From the original fount of joy in the depth of the Universe streams of joy are sent forth into the world, reflecting themselves in the beauty of things and persons.⁹ The universe is a marvellous piece of art produced by the 'Eternal Master-Artist'. In its centre there is a living idea which reveals itself in an eternal symphony, played on innumerable instruments, all keeping perfect time.¹⁰

¹ See above, p. 42; cf. pp. 53, 63, 71.

³ *Sādhana*, 103.

⁵ *Ib.*, 104.

⁷ *Ib.*, 183.

⁹ *Ib.*, 223.

² See above, p. 63.

⁴ *The Religion of Man*, 94.

⁶ *Ib.*, 107.

⁸ *Reminiscences*, 237.

¹⁰ *Creative Unity*, 35.

What music is that in whose measure the world is rocked?
 We laugh when it beats upon the crest of life,
 we shrink in terror when it returns into the dark.
 But the play is the same that comes and goes
 with the rhythm of the endless music.¹

There is scarcely any subject which has given Tagore more inspiration than that of joy. His lecture on 'Realisation in Love' ends like a hymn of joy: 'And joy is everywhere; it is in the earth's green covering of grass; in the blue serenity of the sky; in the reckless exuberance of spring. In the severe abstinence of grey winter; in the living flesh that animates our bodily frame; in the perfect poise of the human figure, noble and upright; in living; in the exercise of all our powers; in the acquisition of knowledge; in fighting evils; in dying for gains we never can share. Joy is there everywhere; it is superfluous, unnecessary; nay, it very often contradicts the most peremptory behests of necessity. It exists to show that the bonds of law can only be explained by love; they are like body and soul. Joy is the realisation of the truth of oneness, the oneness of our soul with the world and of the world-soul with the supreme lover.'²

Clearly this joy-aspect of the world excludes a pessimistic view of life.

With Buddha pessimism, life-negation and asceticism became dominant factors in the religious life of India. They were not invented by Buddha. All their roots can be traced back to the Upanishads. For the logical consequences of the Upanishadic *Ātma-Brahma* and *Māyā* doctrines are life-negation and the *sannyāsi* ideal of life, the life of renunciation. But they needed the Buddhistic emphasis on redemption from *karma* and *samsāra* in order to become really dominant.³ Buddhism was expelled from its motherland, but it left the mark of life-negation and asceticism on the Indian soul, which has never since been able to rid itself of it.⁴

Tagore is definitely opposed to the ascetic ideal of life. In his lectures on 'Man' he scolds the *sannyāsis* who translate in their lives the philosophy of 'I am He' into extreme inactivity and callousness, who shut the doors of their senses in order not to be led astray and

¹ *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 52.

² *Sādhana*, 116.

³ A. Schweitzer: *Indian Thought and its Development*, 42.

⁴ S. Radhakrishnan: *The Philosophy of Tagore*, 118.

captured by the delights of the world, who torture their bodies in order to cross the boundary of animal existence, and who also discard the independent responsibility of man in their presumption of denying and transcending humanity. 'They do not recognise Him', he maintains, 'who is humanity in man.'¹ Theirs is not the way Tagore recommends. The callousness of asceticism pitted against the callousness of luxury is merely fighting one evil with the help of another, 'inviting the pitiless demon of the desert in place of the indiscriminate demon of the jungle'.²

True, at every step in life we are reminded of its perishableness and of the transitoriness of all human relationships. And yet it is equally true, Tagore maintains, that, though all our mortal relationships have their end, we cannot ignore them with impunity while they last. If we behave as if they do not exist, merely because they will not continue for ever, they will all the same exact their dues, with a great deal over by way of penalty. Trying to ignore bonds that are real, albeit temporary, only strengthens and prolongs their bondage. 'We do not attain our goal by destroying our path.'³

'Deliverance is not for me in renunciation', Tagore asserts in a poem in *Gitanjali*.⁴ 'I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight. . . . No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight, yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love.'⁴ The method of the *yogin*, who 'shuts the doors of his senses', is not the way of the poet. The delights of this world, even if they bring illusions, are not to be shunned, the desires of life are not to be extinguished, but they should be sanctified and consecrated to the service of love.

The voice of life and its joy is too strong to permit Tagore to follow the traditional ideal of a holy life. 'Reverend Sir, forgive this pair of sinners', he says in a poem of good humour in *The Gardener*. 'Spring winds today are blowing in wild eddies, driving dust and dead leaves away, and with them your lessons are all lost. Do not say, father, that life is a vanity.'⁵ In another poem in the same collection he says:

¹ *Man*, 48 f.; cf. *Poems*, no. 14.

² *The Religion of Man*, 180.

³ *The Religion of Man*, 195f.

⁴ *Gitanjali*, no. 73.

⁵ *The Gardener*, no. 44.

No, my friends, I shall never be an ascetic,
whatever you may say.

I shall never be an ascetic if she does not take
the vow with me.

It is my firm resolve that if I cannot find
a shady shelter and a companion for my penance,
I shall never turn ascetic.

No, my friends, I shall never leave my heart and home,
and retire into the forest solitude,
if rings no merry laughter in its echoing shade
and if the end of no saffron mantle flutters in the wind;
if its silence is not deepened by soft whispers.

I shall never be an ascetic.¹

This positive attitude towards life was felt as something new and fascinating among his countrymen. Yeats, in his introduction to *Gitanjali*, reports a distinguished Bengal doctor of medicine as saying of Tagore: 'He is the first among our saints who has not refused to live, but has spoken out of Life itself, and that is why we give him our love.'²

Tagore has described the birth of this new view of life in his first drama of any importance, *Nature's Revenge*. The hero is a *sannyāsi* who has been striving to gain victory over nature by cutting off all the bonds of desires and affections and thus to arrive at the true and profound knowledge of Brahma. A little girl, however, whom he has brought up, brings him back from his dreams of the infinite to the world and to the bondage of human affection. The *sannyāsi* comes to know that God is to be found in the naturalness of human life. 'This was to put in a slightly different form the story of my own experience', Tagore says, when he tells the story in his *Reminiscences*.³ Shortly after this drama was written he married. When he wrote his *Reminiscences* he looked upon the drama from a philosophical angle and described it as an introduction to the whole of his future literary work, a prelude to the great theme of all his writings: the joy of attaining the Infinite within the finite.⁴

How foreign the traditional Hindu ideal of holiness was to

¹ *Ib.*, no. 43.

² *Gitanjali*, p. ix.

³⁻⁴ *Reminiscences*, 238.

him is revealed in a poem in *The Gardener* which deals with the same conflict.

At midnight the would-be ascetic announced:
 'This is the time to give up my own and seek for God.
 Ah, who has held me so long in delusion here?'
 God whispered, 'I', but the ears of the man were stopped.
 With a baby asleep at her breast lay his wife,
 peacefully sleeping on one side of the bed.
 The man said, 'Who are ye that have fooled me so long?'
 The voice said again, 'They are God',
 but he heard it not.
 The baby cried out in its dream, nestling close to its mother.
 God commanded, 'Stop, fool, leave not thy home',
 but still he heard not.
 God sighed and complained, 'Why does my servant wander
 to seek me, forsaking me?'¹

From the time of Yājñavalkya of the *Bṛihādaranyaka Upanishad* up to the present time so many earnest seekers after God in India have acted just like the man of this poem, and among them Rabindranath's own father. But after one and a half year's absence he was called back from his seclusion in the Himalayas to his home by the voice of God—fortunately, for otherwise the world would never have had the privilege of listening to the sweet songs of Rabindranath, who was born three years later.²

In Tagore's poetry we meet a totally different ideal. God is to be found not in a self-chosen seclusion far away from life's turmoil, but in the joys and sorrows and duties of common human life and in the

¹ *The Gardener*, no. 75. In the poems of Kabir there are several which touch upon the same subject. 'He is dear to me indeed who can call back the wanderer to his home. In the home is the true union, in the home is enjoyment of life; why should I forsake my home and wander in the forest? . . . Kabir says: The home is the abiding place; in the home is reality.' (*One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, no. 40.) 'I laugh when I hear that the fish in the water is thirsty: you do not see that the Real is in your home, and you wander from forest to forest listlessly.' (*Ib.*, no. 43.)

² In his *Autobiography* (202 ff.) Devendranath himself has told the story of his departure from home and the events and sentiments which brought him back.

bonds of human relationships. 'They are God,' he says—which should not be understood merely in the mystical sense of the Upanishads that God is immanent in them, but in the sense of the Gospel that in serving those whom God has given to us we serve Him. A new time with new ideals is dawning on India. 'O thou distraught wanderer, thou *Sannyasin*, drunk in the wine of self-intoxication, dost thou not already hear the progress of the human soul along the high-way traversing the wide fields of humanity!' the poet exclaims.¹

Tagore was the prophet of an unflinching optimism, which is the exact opposite to the pessimistic view of life and the world from which Buddha's thinking took its start. According to Buddha life, from beginning to end, is suffering. In his famous sermon in Banaras he said: 'Now this, O *bhikkhus*, is the noble truth of suffering: Birth is suffering; decay is suffering; disease is suffering; death is suffering; to be conjoined with things which we dislike is suffering; to be separated from things which we like is suffering; not to get what one wants—that also is suffering. In short, these five aggregates (matter, feeling, perception, tendencies, consciousness) which are the objects of grasping are suffering.'² Buddha's remedy was to cut away the bonds which tie us to the world, and extinguish the thirst for life. Tagore said: 'This world is sweet—I do not want to die. I wish to dwell in the ever-living life of Man.'³ 'I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight.'⁴ 'In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet.' 'Bonds? Indeed they are bonds, this love and this hope in our hearts. They are as mother's arms pressing the child to the warmth at her bosom. Thirst? Yes, it is the thirst which leads life to reach the source of its joy in the breasts of the eternal mother.'

By this attitude towards life Tagore has left the traditional Hindu conception behind and approached the Christian view of life. To be sure, he proves his world- and life-affirmation by quotations from the Upanishads. One would not deny that there are such elements in the Upanishads, but they are not dominant. It is possible to quote stray verses which express joy in life, but they do not indicate the main trend of the Upanishadic view. The dominant note is the overwhelming emphasis on an inwardliness, which issues in the

¹ *Sādhana*, 129.

² *The Dhamma-Cakka-Pavattana Sutta*, 5.

³ *Reminiscences*, 266; cf. *Poems*, no. 67.

⁴ *Gitanjali*, no. 73, 103; *Poems*, no. 9.

denial of the reality of the outer world and creates the ideal of the *sannyāsi*, the one who has renounced all the joys of the external world.

It may be argued that in Christianity too there is a world- and life-negation which has given rise to an asceticism and monasticism of considerable growth in the Church. That is true, and we may pause a moment to find out how far this asceticism and monasticism in Christendom are truly Christian. It is remarkable that these things did not appear in the Church until the third century, and that they began to spread only in the fourth century, when the Church had become a privileged institution in the state and had received into its fold masses of people with little understanding of the Christian faith. The spread of monasticism can be interpreted as a protest of the Christian spirit against the worldliness of the Church.

The question is, however, whether this is the whole explanation, or whether in the Christian faith itself there are elements which naturally issue in world- and life-negation if circumstances are favourable for such a development. In support of this view are adduced instances like Christ's word to the rich young man: 'Go and sell all you have, give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, take up the cross, and follow Me';¹ and St. Paul's advice to the Christians at Corinth to remain unmarried, if they were not married already;² or reference is made to Christ's fast in the wilderness³ and St. Paul's stay in Arabia after his conversion.⁴ But these and other similar quotations do not prove any asceticism in the Gospel. Generally Christ did not demand of His followers that they should sell their property and give the money to the poor. For His demand on this occasion He may have had special reasons. And St. Paul's advice to the Corinthians was not prompted by any ascetic principle of his, but by 'the imminent distress of these days'. As for his stay in Arabia, it seems most likely that he engaged himself there in preaching the Gospel. Our Lord's fast in the wilderness, apparently, was a temporary measure at a time of inward struggle for guidance and clearness about the course He should take in establishing the Kingdom. After His return from the wilderness we find no ascetic tendencies in His life. On the contrary, He deliberately took a course different from the asceticism of John the Baptist.⁵

On the other hand, it should not be denied that there is an

¹ Mark 10: 21 (Moffat's translation).

² 1 Cor. 7: 26.

³ Matt. 4: 1ff.

⁴ Gal. 1: 17.

⁵ Matt. 11: 18, 19.

element of other-worldliness in the Gospel. This is due to its eschatological character. The Kingdom is not of this world,¹ it is from above, and it comes through a mighty deed of God. The New Testament research of this century stands in the sign, not to say in the spell, of the eschatological idea. To the present writer it seems that the New Testament expectation of the imminent end of the world has been onesidedly stressed and therefore overemphasised by modern research. It is time to remember the other aspect of the Kingdom as preached by Jesus and the Apostles: the Kingdom is a present reality here and now, in our midst in this world.²

It is, however, evident that Jesus and the Apostles expected the end of the world very soon, even in their own generation. This gave to the other-worldly aspect an emphasis which prompted a revaluation of things in this world. It is in this light that we have to interpret some stern words in the Gospel about money, family life, and other things pertaining to life on the earth, *e.g.*, 'Woe to the world for hindrances! . . . If your hand or your foot is a hindrance to you, cut it off and throw it away; better be maimed or crippled and get into Life, than keep both feet or hands and be thrown into the everlasting fire';³ or: 'He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.'⁴ Hand and foot, certainly, are good and necessary things, and Jesus healed many crippled and maimed persons and restored to them the full use of their limbs. He appreciated family life and accepted the invitation to a wedding feast.⁵ He branded as hypocrisy and sin the neglect of father and mother for the fulfilling of religious rites and duties.⁶ But if these things became a hindrance to a person for receiving the Kingdom, then they had to be sacrificed as minor boons, in order to gain the most precious pearl of the Kingdom.⁷ If there is anything of negation in the attitude of Jesus towards the boons of this world, it is not absolute but conditioned: *If* they become a hindrance, they have to be sacrificed. This 'negative' attitude may have been enhanced, to a certain extent, by the expectation of an imminent crisis.

The same is the case with St. Paul. When he writes: 'I mean, brothers,—the interval has been shortened; so let those who have wives live as if they had none, let mourners live as if they were not

¹ John 18: 26.

² Luke 11: 20; 17: 21.

³ Matt. 18: 7, 8 (Moffatt's translation).

⁴ Matt. 10: 37 (Moffatt's translation).

⁵ John 2: 1 ff.

⁶ Mark 7: 10 ff.

⁷ Matt. 13: 45 f.

mourning, let the joyful live as if they had no joy, let buyers live as if they had no hold on their goods, let those who mix in the world live as if they were not engrossed in it, for the present phase of things is passing away',¹ these words evidently have to be understood in the light of the expectation of the imminent end of this world.

This does not mean that such advice, apart from the expectation of the immediate end of history, loses its significance. The Kingdom will always and under all circumstances remain the precious pearl, in comparison with which all other things are of minor value, and which will have to be sacrificed, if they become a hindrance to it. Moreover, a Christian will never satisfy himself with life in this world. His longing goes out to the abodes in his Father's house.² He will always confess himself to be a pilgrim in this earth.³

Yet this other-worldliness of the Christian faith does not imply that this world is in itself evil and therefore has to be renounced. It is one of the chief doctrines of the Christian faith that this world is a creation of God, the Father of Jesus Christ, and is governed by Him. 'The earth is His footstool.'⁴ Even as a pilgrim the Christian feels himself to be in the realm of his Father, and he enjoys the beauty and glory of God's creation.

Bright is creation,
Beauteous is God's heaven,
Radiant the path pilgrims march along.
On through the glory
Of earthly Kingdoms
Go we to Paradise with song.⁵

Typical of the evangelical attitude towards temporal boons and life in this world is Martin Luther's explanation of the fourth petition in the Lord's prayer: 'What is implied in the words "Our daily bread"? Answer: All things that pertain to the wants and support of this present life; such as food, raiment, money, goods, house and land, and other property; a faithful spouse and good children; trustworthy servants and faithful magistrates; favourable seasons, peace and health; education and honour; true friends, good neighbours and the like.'⁶

¹ 1 Cor. 7: 29 ff. (Moffat's translation).

² John 14: 2.

³ Heb. 11: 13.

⁴ Isa. 66: 1.

⁵ B. S. Ingemann, 1789-1862, Danish poet and professor.

⁶ *Small Catechism*, Part III.

We move in an altogether different atmosphere when we enter into the asceticism and the monasticism of the Ancient Church and the Middle Ages. The principles underlying this asceticism can be shortly characterised in two points: (1) this world being material is opposed to the spiritual world and consequently evil; to live in it is to live in a prison-house; the really 'religious life', *vita religiosa*, therefore is the life of renunciation; 'secular' life is a compromise; (2) the life of renunciation constitutes a religious merit through which salvation is attained.

The metaphysical dualism between matter and spirit is of Greek origin and has crept into the Church along with Gnosticism and Greek philosophy. The meritorial aspect of the 'religious life' is unchristian and altogether foreign to the Gospel. We must maintain, therefore, that the asceticism and monasticism of the Christian Church, though it has rendered and still may render the Church some service as a reminder of the other-worldliness of the Christian faith and as a protest against the worldliness of the Church, is not genuinely Christian. It is of non-Christian origin, and it is apt even to breed unchristian notions and views, which seriously endanger the purity of the Gospel.

Tagore, in rejecting the traditional world- and life-negation of his ancestral religion and in accepting a positive attitude to life in this world, is in line with the main trend of the Christian faith. And there can be little doubt that his attitude, to a large extent, is due to Christian influence. His attitude in this respect is not an isolated fact. Albert Schweitzer has pointed out that he stands at the end of a long process of development in which the old world- and life-negation of Hinduism has gradually been made to give room to world- and life-affirmation combined with the Christian ethic of love. 'Though stray elements of this development can be traced back to the Upanishads and the *bhakti*-religion of India, it was only when men like Ram Mohan Roy and all the rest of the heroes of modern Indian culture became acquainted with and influenced by Western culture and Christian ethics that these elements could come to power and develop.'¹ 'Certainly Tagore can point in the Upanishads to world and life affirmation and ethics existing side by side. But this is not his own profound ethical world and life affirmation which he possesses in common with the noblest thinkers of modern Europe. That only came into being after a long process of historical development.'²

¹ Albert Schweitzer: *Indian Thought and its Development*, 208, 240 ff.

² *Ib.*, 243.

Tagore was not blind to the miseries and sufferings of life. He himself had many a bitter experience of them. Personal bereavements darkened his horizon more than once. And in spite of all the fame and honour which were lavishly bestowed on him he was not spared private and public disappointments. But with the exception of the heart-breaking poems which were published after the death of his wife, his sorrows and disappointments have not left their mark on his works. They were not strong enough to shake his faith in the ultimate goodness and joy which are seated at the centre of the universe. 'On the contrary', says Professor Mukerji, 'he almost always succeeded in converting them into materials for a deeper apprehension of the spirit and for nobler expressions of the joy which, in his view, pervaded the universe.'¹

Tagore, in opposition to the general tradition of India, did not shun the sufferings of life as an evil. He succeeded in getting a positive meaning out of them. 'Life's tragedies occur, not to demonstrate their own reality, but to reveal that eternal principle of joy in life, to which they gave a rude shaking.'² Suffering is not incompatible with joy; rather joy is enhanced by it. Occasionally Tagore accepts the idea that suffering and pain are necessary to make us conscious of the existence of joy, as the shades are needed to exhibit the figures in a picture, or, in another simile, as 'there must come a full pause to weave perfection into music'.³ 'The meaning of health comes home to us with painful force when disease disturbs it.'⁴

Tagore, however, has discovered deeper aspects of the sufferings of life. They are means of perfection. Pain is our true wealth as imperfect beings. It is the hard coin which must be paid for everything valuable in this life, for our power, our wisdom, our love.⁵ It is the birth-pangs of joy. The flower, in order to bring forth fruit, has to shed its exquisite petals and 'a cruel economy compels it to give up its sweet perfume'.⁶ Viewed in this way, pain is only 'the other side of joy'.⁷ 'In pain is symbolised the infinite possibility of perfection, the eternal unfolding of joy.'⁸ The most important lesson that we can learn from our life, therefore, is not that there is pain in this world, but that it depends upon ourselves to turn it to good account, that it is possible to transmute it into joy.⁹

¹ D. P. Mukerji: *Tagore*, 15.

² *The Gardener*, no. 68.

³ *Sādhana*, 64.

⁴ *Ib.*, 64.

⁵ *Ib.*, 65.

⁶ *Creative Unity*, 5.

⁷ *Creative Unity*, 4.

⁸ *Ib.*, 99.

⁹ *Ib.*, 64.

A really religious aspect of the sufferings of life is reached when Tagore sees it as a means in the hands of God for the fostering of a spiritual character in him. There are many different desires in his heart, but many of them, being selfish and foolish, are real hindrances to his spiritual growth. God therefore, in His mercy, denies the fulfilment of his desires even at the cost of great pain.

My desires are many and my cry is pitiful,
but ever didst thou save me by hard refusals;
and this strong mercy has been wrought into my life
through and through.

Day by day thou art making me worthy
of the simple, great gifts that thou givest to me unasked —
this sky and the light, this body and the life
and the mind—
saving me from the perils of overmuch desire.

There are times when I languidly linger
and times when I awaken and hurry in search of my goal;
but cruelly thou hidest thyself from before me.

Day by day thou art making me worthy
of thy full acceptance by refusing me ever and anon,
saving me from perils of weak, uncertain desire.¹

Suffering and pain are messengers of God's love. 'God says to man: I heal you, therefore I hurt, love you, therefore punish.'² Professor Radhakrishnan points out the parallelism between this thought and the sayings of the Old Testament: 'Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth';³ and 'Stripes that wound cleanse away evil.'⁴ Through suffering God in His 'strong mercy' calls our forgetful and erring heart back to His fatherly bosom. 'Misery knocks at my door, and her message is that thy lord is wakeful, and he calls thee to the love-tryst through the darkness of night.'⁵

Tagore is not afraid of sorrow and pain; he welcomes it as a means of cleansing, perfection and enrichment. He prays that God may strike at the root of penury in his heart.⁶

¹ *Gitanjali*, no. 14: cf. *Poems*, no. 36.

² *Stray Birds*, no. 63.

³ S. Radhakrishnan: *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, 92.

⁴ Prov. 3: 12; 20: 30.

⁵ *Gitanjali*, no. 27.

⁶ *Ib.*, no. 36.

Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers
but to be fearless in facing them.

Let me not beg for the stilling of my pain
but for the heart to conquer it.

Let me not look for allies in life's battlefield
but to my own strength.

Let me not crave in anxious fear to be saved
but hope for the patience to win my freedom.

Grant me that I may not be a coward,
feeling your mercy in my success alone;
but let me find the grasp of your hand in my failure.¹

Failure and defeat, no less than success and triumph, are messengers of God's goodness. 'I will deck thee with trophies, garlands of my defeat. It is never in my power to escape unconquered.'² 'My master has bid me, while I stand at the roadside, to sing the song of Defeat, for that is the bride whom He woos in secret.'³

Tagore is convinced that pain and sorrow have a divine meaning as means of greater beauty and joy, and he prays that this gracious purpose may be fulfilled.

The pain was great when the strings were being tuned,
my Master!

Begin your music, and let me forget the pain;
let me feel in beauty what you had in your mind
through those pitiless days.

The waning night lingers at my doors,
let her take her leave in songs.

Pour your heart into my life strings, my Master,
in tunes that descend from your stars.⁴

Generally people do not recognise the blessing of sorrow, but the poet has discovered the precious gift she brings to those who humbly receive her. 'She has put on the dark veil, hiding her face from the

¹ *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 79.

³ *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 85.

² *Gitanjali*, no. 98.

⁴ *Ib.*, no. 49.

crowd, but the jewel glows on her breast in the dark.'¹ 'She is the vestal virgin consecrated to the service of the immortal perfection, and when she takes her true place before the altar of the infinite she casts off her dark veil and bares her face to the beholder as a revelation of supreme joy.'²

Tagore's view of suffering is remarkable, inasmuch as it is novel in Indian religious literature. Buddha's view of suffering, as we have already pointed out, was quite different. In his teaching, suffering was the evil, the way out of which he believed himself to have found and tried to show to his followers. Also in traditional Hinduism suffering is looked upon primarily as an evil, as a punishment of *karma*, experienced in *samsāra*, the salvation from which is the great aim of Hindu religious life. A really positive aspect of suffering is therefore not possible. In the *Gītā* we are told to disregard pain as well as pleasure; otherwise the peace of mind will be disturbed. But this attitude of indifference to pain and suffering is quite different from a positive evaluation of them.

Tagore would by no means deny that much suffering and misery is punishment for sin. But his view of suffering is not exhausted by that. His conception of suffering as a means in the hand of God for our perfection, and his view of sorrow and defeat as messengers of God's love bringing blessings in disguise to us, approach the Christian view of suffering; and it is significant that Professor Radhakrishnan had to resort to the Bible in order to find real parallels to Tagore's statements on this point.³

Not even death could shake Tagore's faith in the ultimate joy and goodness of the universe. He had more than enough personal experience of the harvest of death in his family. Within a brief compass of time he lost his wife, two daughters, one son, his old father and a great friend. He had his first real acquaintance with death at the age of twenty-four, when his sister-in-law, his brother Jyotirindra's wife, whom he had loved and adored as a mother, died. In his *Reminiscences* he has described the terrible shock this unexpected loss made on him: 'The acquaintance which I made with Death at the age of twenty-four was a permanent one, and its blow has continued to add itself to each succeeding bereavement in an ever-lengthening chain of tears. . . . That there could be any gap in the unbroken procession of the joys and sorrows of life was a thing I had

¹ *Ib.*, no. 85.

² *Sādhana*, 65.

³ See above, p. 84.

no idea of. I could therefore see nothing beyond, and this life I had accepted as all in all. When of a sudden death came, and in a moment made a gaping rent in its smooth-seeming fabric, I was utterly bewildered. . . . The terrible darkness which was disclosed to me through this rent, continued to attract me night and day as time went on. I would ever and anon return to take my stand there and gaze upon it, wondering what there was left in place of what had gone. . . . And yet in the midst of this unbearable grief, flashes of joy seemed to sparkle in my mind, now and again, in a way which quite surprised me. That life was not a stable permanent fixture was itself the sorrowful tidings which helped to lighten my mind. That we were not prisoners for ever within a solid stone wall of life was the thought which unconsciously kept coming uppermost in rushes of gladness. That which I had held I was made to let go—this was the sense of loss which distressed me,—but when at the same moment I viewed it from the standpoint of freedom gained, a great peace fell upon me.

‘The all-pervading pressure of worldly existence compensates itself by balancing life against death, and thus it does not crush us. The terrible weight of an unopposed life-force has not to be endured by man,—this truth came upon me that day as a sudden, wonderful revelation.

‘With the loosening of the attraction of the world, the beauty of nature took on for me a deeper meaning. Death had given me the correct perspective from which to perceive the world in the fulness of its beauty, and as I saw the picture of the Universe against the background of Death I found it entrancing.’¹

We have given space to this rather long quotation, because this struggle for getting a meaning out of death, which it reveals, is remarkable indeed. To Buddha *jarāmarana*, senescence and death, along with worry, wailing, pain, sorrow and despair, was the last link in the abominable chain of cases of evil, from which he sought liberation.² To Tagore death has lost its fearful character. Like suffering it serves to intensify the joy of life. As he saw the picture of the universe against the background of death he ‘found it entrancing’. ‘Our life is eager, our desires are keen, for time tolls the bell of parting. Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.’³ An endless

¹ *Reminiscences*, 257 ff.

² Edv. Lehmann: *Buddha*, 131.

³ *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 68.

life would be a burden. 'Through death man is spared from 'the terrible weight of an unopposed life-force'. 'Our life is not the one old burden, our path is not the one long journey. One sole poet has not to sing one aged song. Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.'¹ This truth came upon him 'as a sudden, wonderful revelation'.

Death had ceased to terrify him, because it had lost its negative aspect. If death is taken as an isolated fact it seems terrible. It is like looking at a piece of cloth through a microscope, gazing at the big holes between the threads. We must look at death in its connection with life. For 'death belongs to life as birth does. The walk is in the raising of the foot as in laying of it down.'² In the dualism of death and life there is harmony. The flower has to die to give life to the fruit, the fruit has to die to give life to the plant.³ Death is not the ultimate reality; it is a portal to a new life.⁴ To this problem we will return at a later stage of our investigation.⁵

Tagore's optimistic view of life is closely connected with his faith in evolution. *The Religion of Man* opens with a grand description of 'the march of evolution ever unfolding the potentialities of life'.⁶ Also in his Andhra University lectures on *Man* (1937) this firm belief in the progress of life and culture is evident. 'In the great evolution of the Universe we have found its first significance in a cell of life, then in animal, then in Man. From the outer universe gradually we come to the inner realm and one by one the gates of freedom are unbarred.'⁷ Tagore has an unbounded faith in the unlimited possibilities of humanity. 'Man is a born child, his power is the power of growth.'⁸

Naturally Tagore did not conceive of evolution as an unbroken and straight march from lower to ever higher forms and stages of life. Stagnations and setbacks are facts too obvious to be ignored. But, like all believers in evolution, Tagore looked upon these facts as something occasional and transitory, without the power seriously to hinder life's mighty march upwards; and he looked forward to a future in which life would have reached the highest level of perfection. 'The history of the earth is the history of earthquakes and floods and volcanic fires, and yet through it all, it is the history of the green fields and bubbling streams, of beauty and of prolific life. The

¹ *The Gardener*, no. 68.

² *The Religion of Man*, 199.

³ See chapter VII below.

⁴ *Man*, 60 f.

⁵ *Stray Birds*, no. 268.

⁶ *Sādhana*, 50.

⁷ *The Religion of Man*, 14.

⁸ *Stray Birds*, no. 25.

spiritual world, which is being built of man's life and that of God, will pass its infancy of helpless falls and bruises, and one day will stand firm in its vigour of youth, glad in its own beauty and freedom of movement.¹

When Tagore, in the midst of the din and tumult of the second world-war, departed from this life, his faith in the progress of humanity had been rudely shaken. In his address on *The Crisis of Civilisation*, given on his eightieth birthday, a few months before his death, he confessed that he at one time had believed that the springs of civilisation would issue out of the heart of Europe. But that faith had gone bankrupt altogether. 'As I look around I see the crumbling ruins of a proud civilisation strewn like a vast heap of futility.'² But he refused to give up his faith in humanity. He continued: 'And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man. I would rather look forward to the opening of a new chapter in his history, after the cataclysm is over and the atmosphere rendered clean with the spirit of service and sacrifice. Perhaps that dawn will come from this horizon, from the East where the sun rises.'² One wishes that one could share this hope, but sad to confess the prospects in this respect are not much brighter in the East than in the West.

It is obvious that Tagore's faith in evolution had its origin in his close contact with Western civilisation, where this faith was a dominant feature when he was young. The main trend of Darwin's theory of evolution has gone into the veins of Tagore. Still more has the philosophy of Herbert Spencer formed his conception of evolution, although he was unable to accept Spencer's irreligious agnosticism. Also the French philosopher Henri Bergson may have influenced him. The very title of his book, *Creative Unity*, reminds us of the title of Bergson's chief work, *Creative Evolution*. It is outside the scope of the present investigation to search for parallels and differences between Tagore and the great French philosopher. Suffice it to say that without the influence of the evolution theory of the West Tagore's conception of evolution would be unthinkable.

The foundation of his faith in the evolution and progress of life he sought in the unity of life, the spirit that pervades and permeates the whole universe. Tagore took great interest in biology, because he believed in life as a manifestation of the Eternal, but he did not satisfy

¹ *Personality*, 104.

² Quoted from D. S. Sarma: *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, 344.

himself with the biologism of Bergson. In his view, it was not the evolution as such that was creative but the spirit immanent in it. Tagore, therefore, did not write a book on *Creative Evolution* but on *Creative Unity*. The similarity of and the difference between these two titles are significative of the influence of Bergson on Tagore as well as of the difference between them.

Here we have reached the point where Tagore's optimistic faith in the progress of life can be confronted with the Christian faith. Is the idea of evolution a Christian idea? Some theologians have believed it to be so. The late Archbishop Nathan Söderblom most emphatically maintained that this idea had its origin not in the brains of some philosophers and scientists or historians but in the unshakeable faith of the prophets of Israel that God is governing the world and leading it towards a goal set by His holy will.¹ It should be immediately noted, however, that, in Söderblom's view, evolution was not due to forces immanent in man or in the world, but to God's holy will and power governing, through judgment and grace, the course of the world and the history of mankind.

✓ The catastrophies of two world-wars with their terrific revelations of the formidable evil forces which are hidden in man have laid the bright hope for human progress in ruins. Those seem now to be very few who are courageous enough to expect anything but a gloomy future for mankind. Yet it may be worth while to investigate whether a more optimistic outlook is in keeping with the Christian faith, whether we may conceive of the kingdom of God in terms of development and evolution.

There are many features in the New Testament which could be adduced in support of this idea. The kingdom of God is to grow like a small mustard seed into a big tree; it is like a leaven, working in the mass of dough of mankind 'till it all is leavened'.² Christ taught His disciples to pray: 'Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'³ He assured them: 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.'⁴ Usually this word is interpreted to mean that only 'a little flock' will be saved. I am unable to interpret it in that way. In that case the word would have to signify the extreme littleness of the saved flock. For the Greek word here translated by 'little' is a

¹ N. Söderblom: *The Nature of Revelation*, 202.

² Matt. 13. 30 f.

³ Matt. 6. 10.

⁴ Luke 12. 32.

diminutive, meaning 'little, little'; in addition it is not placed after its noun, as generally is the case in Greek, but before its noun, thereby getting emphasis. A translation which would give the full force of the expression, therefore, would be 'little, little, little' flock. In my opinion, the saying is not meant to emphasise that only an utterly small little flock will be saved. For I read this word in the light of the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven. There the emphasis is just on the contrast between the insignificant beginning and the unexpectedly great result. Read in this light, the word of 'the little flock' would get some such meaning as this: Ye are now but a little flock. Yet fear not, the good pleasure of the Father and the power of His Kingdom are on your side; your little flock will grow and become large and mighty; the Kingdom is yours.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is said, with reference to an Old Testament psalm, that all things are put under the control of Christ, 'although,' the author adds, 'as it is, we do not see all things controlled by Him',¹ the implication being that in due time it will become apparent that all things are put under His control. And St. Paul, referring to the same psalm, says that 'He must reign until all his foes (*i.e.*, evil and destructive forces) are put under His feet',² and the Apostle even goes to the length of saying that God has purposed 'to gather up all things in Christ'.³

It is obvious, however, that there are many other utterances in the New Testament which point in an opposite direction, words which seem to indicate that things in this world are going to become worse and worse, until everything ends in an ultimate catastrophe. Even if some of these words are capable of a different interpretation,⁴ it should not be denied that we find in the New Testament two seemingly different lines of thought in regard to this problem. In order to understand them rightly it is not sufficient to seek for and enumerate a number of words and sayings in support of the one theory or the other, and so form an opinion on quantitative grounds. We must take into consideration the central message of the New Testament. Only in the light of that is a right understanding possible. First, when Jesus speaks of a coming catastrophe we must remember the whole biblical background to this expectation. This background, as Nathan Söderblom pointed out⁵, is the conviction that God is governing the course of the world and the history of mankind, leading

¹ Heb. 2.8.² 1 Cor. 15.25.³ Eph. 1.10.⁴ Mark. 13.8; Matt. 24.8.⁵ Cf. above, p. 94.

it to a goal which His holy will has purposed for it. The eschatology of the Gospel, therefore, is determined by a teleological conception of the course of history. Secondly, if God is holy, saving love, and if the power of God is stronger than that of the devil, I fail to see how we can interpret the New Testament in an utterly pessimistic way, thinking that God will be satisfied with rescuing only a 'little flock', leaving the vast mass of mankind to the devil. In that case, Satan would have reason enough to be quite satisfied with the outcome of the process of history. But it is impossible to believe that God's holy and powerful love would permit things to take such a course. His mighty deeds in the Incarnation and the Cross forbid that. They are the guarantees for a more optimistic outlook.

But it must be expressly stated that the Christian optimism is of a quite other type than that of the believers in evolution. Its characteristics are to be found, not in the idea of forces of goodness immanent in man, but along the lines of thought which Archbishop Söderblom followed: God governing the world in accordance with His holy will and leading it to a goal set by His love.

Tagore's optimism was founded on his faith in man. He believed in creative forces immanent in the world and in man, forces which automatically made life, viewed as a whole, a constant evolutionary progress. He considered it a grievous sin to lose faith in man,¹ and he prayed: 'Let me not look for allies in life's battlefield but to my own strength.'²

This kind of optimism is totally foreign to the Gospel. It does not take into account the formidable sway of evil forces in the world, and the fallen status of mankind. According to the Bible the world is not, in its present state, what God purposed it to be. It is damaged by the 'enemy'. It is like a well-prepared field of wheat, in which the enemy has sown his tares.³ Humanity, through disobedience and rebellion against God, has landed itself in misery and fallen into captivity to evil forces, unable to liberate and help itself. In science and material culture it may be able to make progress, but not spiritually and morally, for it has lost its God-given power in this respect. 'All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God', St. Paul says.⁴ On this point the Christian faith is deeply pessimistic.

¹ See above, p. 93. ² *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 79.

³ Matt. 13.24 ff. This parable primarily refers to the conditions of the word of God in this world, but its meaning has a relevance to all God's works.

⁴ Rom. 3.23.

But God has not left His creation in its misery. He has put new creative forces, new life, into the world. This life is in His Son.¹ 'The new force in the world is the person of Jesus Christ', Archbishop Söderblom said. On this point the Christian faith is highly optimistic, for it sees no limits to the power of Christ and the extension of the Kingdom of God. In Christ, whom God has made Saviour and Lord, there is hope for humanity; in Him there is salvation and progress.

But only in Him. Apart from Christ there is only deterioration, destruction and death for humanity. The recent history of European civilisation is evidence enough of this.² The glorious Western culture was built on the Christian faith. But in the nations of Europe there has been going on, during more than a century, a movement away from Christ. They are now reaping its fruits. If there is any hope for the future of Europe, it is in a return to Christ. This holds good for the whole world.

¹ 1 John 3.11.

V

TAGORE'S CONCEPTION OF MAN

Man, as Tagore sees him, is no stranger in the universe, for he has emerged out of the universe as its innermost meaning and purpose.

In his grand description of evolution Tagore makes us see how 'light, as the radiant energy of creation, started its ringdance o atoms', and how 'then came a time when life was brought into the arena in the tiniest little monocycle of a cell', facing the ponderous enormity of things, and with its gifts of growth and power of adaptation contradicted the meaninglessness of their bulk. 'It was made conscious, not of the volume but of the value of existence.' But the miracle of creation did not stop there. 'A multitude of cells were bound together in a larger unit, not through aggregation, but through a marvellous quality of complex interrelationship maintaining a perfect co-ordination of functions. This is the creative principle of unity, the divine mystery of existence, that baffles all analysis.'¹

Yet this evolution has its limits. Exaggeration of physical aggrandisement becomes a burden which breaks the natural rhythm of life. A new turn was necessary. It came. 'Man appeared and turned the course of this evolution' from an indefinite march of physical aggrandisement to a freedom of more subtle perfection.'² In this way Tagore describes Man's appearance in the world. His origin accounts for a significant division in his nature.

'At one pole of my being I am one with stocks and stones. There I have to acknowledge the rule of universal law. . . . But at the other pole of my being I am separate from all. There I have broken through the cordon of equality and stand alone as an individual. I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable.'³

In this statement Tagore indicates a dualism in man. Of this dualism there are many phases and aspects. In one respect man is part and parcel of nature. He is a link, the last one of the long chain of evolutionary forms of life. In this respect he is 'one with stocks and stones,' subject to the law of necessity, which is ruling in nature.

¹ *The Religion of Man*, 13 f.

² *Ib.*, 14.

³ *Sādhanā*, 69.

On the other hand he is different from nature. In him evolution has taken 'a new turn'. 'When the course of evolution advanced to the stage of Man its character changed, it shifted its emphasis mainly from the body to the mind.'¹ In the realm of nature the emphasis is on satisfying physical needs. Mind has its necessity also. It must find out reason in things.

Yet there is more in man than body and mind; there is the personal man. He is found in the region where we are free from all necessity—above the needs both of body and mind, above the expedient and useful. This personal man is the highest in man. It has personal relations of its own with the great world, and comes to it for something to satisfy personality.² The distinctive marks of personality are freedom, creative power and love.

This strong emphasis on personality is not Indian. For Hindu philosophy, with its emphasis on oneness with the Absolute, conceived as impersonal, always tends to the dissolution of personality. On this point Tagore betrays an influence of Western philosophy, especially of that of Eucken, who found the unity of existence in the cosmic principle of personality. But Tagore has worked out the idea in his own characteristic way.

Our mind expresses its relationship to the world in science. But science, although useful in producing things that we need, does not present to us the world in its reality, but only a world of abstractions and shadows. The personal man in us expresses his relationship to the world in *Art*.³

The region of Art is feeling. It is the emotional forces within us that make the world real to us. This world, as long as it is a mere object of our perception, remains a guest and a foreigner to us, but it becomes completely our own—and thereby real to us—when it comes within the range of our emotions. God is unreal to us as long as He remains a merely theological idea, but He becomes real to us when we embrace Him with the fire of our feelings.⁴

In the animal world also there is a certain amount of knowledge and feeling. But both of these are bound within the limits of necessity—the necessities of self-preservation and of the preservation of the race: they are limited to utility. In the world of man also they serve such purposes, but they are not limited to them. In man there is a surplus. The most important distinction between the animal and

¹ *Man*, 1.

² *Personality*, 4.

⁴ *Ib.*, 13f.

man is this, that whereas the animal is very nearly bound within the limits of its necessities, like a retail shop-keeper who has only a small profit from his trade, man, in life's commerce, is a big merchant, who earns a great deal more than he is absolutely compelled to spend. Therefore there is a vast excess of wealth in man's life, which gives him the freedom to be useless and irresponsible to a great measure. He has objects which have no relation to utility, but are ends in themselves. He can afford to acquire knowledge merely for the sake of knowledge.

Art moves entirely in this realm of surplus, it is always 'Art for Art's sake'. It is the expression of excessive feelings; the surplus of feelings seeks its outlet in Art.¹

It is the surplus of feelings which makes us conscious of ourselves. As long as our knowledge and our feelings are absorbed in the necessities of life, all our attention is fixed outside us—upon objects which we must acquire for our needs. Therefore there is no real self-consciousness in the animal and only scant self-consciousness in those who are stricken with poverty. But 'when a feeling is aroused in our hearts which is far in excess of the amount that can be completely absorbed by the object which has produced it, it comes back to us and makes us conscious of ourselves by its return waves.'² We feel our personality.

Personality, being born of the excess of feeling, is yearning to express itself. The means of this self-expression of personality is Art. It necessarily uses the language of picture and music.³ Thus, as personality, man becomes creative.

The creative power is a distinguishing mark of man. It has shown itself from the beginning of his chapter of life. From his primitive days he is busy creating a world of his own resources from the raw materials that lie around him. Even the dishes of his food are his own creation, as well as his clothes.

This proves that man is born to a world of freedom. For creation is freedom. It is a prison to have to live in what is; for it is living in what is not ourselves. There we are helplessly subject to the choice of nature, and thus we come under the law of natural selection. But in our creation we live in what is ours, and there the world becomes a world of our own selection; it is subject to our wish and will, and moves with our movement.⁴

¹ *Ib.*, 9.² *Ib.*, 11f.³ *Ib.*, 19.⁴ *Ib.*, 88 f.

Here science can come to the assistance of personality. For she guides man's struggle for freedom against nature's rule. She is working to give into man's hand nature's magic wand of power. As yet science seems very materialistic, and often she shamelessly belies man's own nature. But she is only at the beginning of her work. Tagore does not doubt that 'the day will come, when some of the great powers will be at the beck and call of every individual, and at least the prime necessities of life will be supplied to all with very little care and cost. To live will be as easy to man as to breathe, and his spirit will be free to create his own world.'¹

Creative power is suggestive of divine power. As creator man reveals himself as kindred to God, the Eternal Creator. To this aspect of man we shall have to return later.

From the above account it is clear that, according to Tagore, there exists an indissoluble connection between personality and art. In his opinion, art is the only adequate expression of personality. In this respect it is significant that his lectures on personality are headed by a discourse on 'What is Art?''²

None would deny that art is one of the means through which personality can express itself and that art can much enhance and enrich personality. But it is a different thing to say that art is the only one adequate expression of personality. This clearly is to assign too much to art. For the consequence of this, evidently, is that only the artist can claim real personality. And if the artist is generous enough to admit that every human being, who really deserves this name, is more or less an artist, this view, nevertheless, gives the preference to painters, poets, sculptors and musicians, and we are personalities just in proportion, not only to the creatively artistic power with which a gracious providence has entrusted us, but also in proportion to the measure of time and money which we can afford to spend on the development and practice of our aesthetic faculties. This would place the wealthy in a privileged position in regard to the development of personality. But Jesus said: 'Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.'³ This word of Jesus flashes a clear light on the difference between an aesthetic and a genuinely religious view of man. It is not the development of artistic talents, but man's response to God's challenge and call, that creates real personality. A highly civilised artist may be utterly devoid of personality, whereas a

¹ *Ib.*, 91.

² *Ib.*, 3 ff.

³ Luke 6, 20.

simple man or woman in a village who lives in communion with God can exhibit the inner freedom and love which are constitutive of personality.

Tagore's conception of personality would be extremely one-sided, if he had nothing more to say on this subject. Fortunately he has something more to say, which will lead us deeper into the mystery of human personality.

In nature we are aware of a dualism which can be termed the dualism of separateness and unity. We see a tree; it is separate from its surroundings by the fact of its individual life. And it has to fight for its individual life if it wills to live. But, on the other hand, it cannot maintain its life in absolute separateness. It depends for its life upon its surroundings in the soil, in the air, in the sun. By a thousand threads it is united with the universe. The more perfect the harmony of separateness and unity is, the better. The more perfect the unity with its world of the sun and the soil and the seasons, the more perfect the tree becomes in its individuality. Therefore life, on its negative side, has to maintain separateness from all else, while, on its positive side, it maintains unity with the universe. In man also there is this dualism of physical life, although much more varied. But in him there is another division, which is not explained by the character of his physical life. It is the dualism in his consciousness of what *is* and what *ought* to be. In the animal this is lacking; its conflict is between what *is* and what is *desired*; whereas, in man, the conflict is between what *is* desired and what *should be* desired. What is desired dwells in the heart of the natural life, which we share with animals; but what should be desired belongs to a life which is far beyond it. 'So, in man a second birth has taken place.'¹

Man retains many habits and instincts of his animal life. But his true life is in the region of what ought to be. Many things that are good for the one life are a hindrance to the other. Hence there is a *conflict*. There is a necessity for a man to fight within himself for a higher life. This necessity has introduced into man's personality a new element, which is *character*. From the life of desire character guides man to the life of purpose. This life is the life of the *moral*

¹ *Personality*, 79 f. The term seems to be borrowed from the Hindu idea of the Brahmin as a 'twice-born'. Tagore, however has given it a quite new content. Again the 'second birth', in Tagore's meaning, is very different from the Christian idea of the new birth. (Cf. below, p. 108).

world. In this moral world we come from the world of nature into the world of humanity. 'A human infant is born into the material universe and into the universe of man at the same time.'¹ This world of its 'second birth' is 'a world of ideas and institutions, of stored knowledge and trained habits',² i.e., it is the world of human culture and civilisation. This dualism, however, of the animal life and the moral makes us conscious of our personality as man.³

In the natural world, with the help of science, man is turning the forces of matter from tyranny into obedience and service. But in his moral world he has a harder task to accomplish. In order to mould a good character, he has to turn his own passions and desires from tyranny to obedience.

Man is called to get his will freed from selfish desires and aims in order to serve others. But this call is to a higher stage than that of the moral. When the will is freed from its selfish limitations, it discerns a world transcending the moral realm of humanity. There is a region where all our disciplines of the moral life find their ultimate truth—the region of love. Love is complete union. It leads us into a mystery which is at the heart of things. It opens for us the gate of the world of the Infinite One, who is revealed in the unity of all personalities.⁴

Tagore had an invincible faith in humanity. This faith was built on the conviction of the divinity of man. At every step of our investigation we have met this idea. The unity of the human race has its foundation in the universal spirit, which pervades the whole race and the whole world. Referring to the *mahāvākyam*, 'the great word', of the Upanishads: 'I am He', Tagore says: 'This word carries the assurance of the truth of a grand unity which waits to be realised and justified by the individual.'⁵ This is the dignity of man, his spiritual identity with God Himself.⁶ 'Man is true, where he feels his infinity, where he is divine.'⁷

The momentous religious experience of his youth Tagore later on interpreted as a testimony 'that on the surface of our being we have the ever-changing phases of the individual self, but in the depth there dwells the eternal spirit of human unity beyond our direct knowledge'.⁸ He found the explanation of it in the Upanishadic

¹ *Ib.*, 80 f.; cf. *Sādhana*, 54.

² *Personality*, 83.

³ *Man*, 47.

⁴ *Ib.*, 46.

⁵ *Personality*, 31.

⁶ *The Religion of Man*, 17.

identification of the individual self with the universal self. Owing to the strong influence of Western philosophy, with its emphasis on personality, he interpreted the universal self as personality. It is significant that he does not translate 'the great word' literally, as 'I am *that*', but, 'I am *He*'. Of course, in Vaishnavism he met the belief in a personal God. But this strong emphasis on personality, divine and human, which is a characteristic of Tagore's philosophy, is not Indian. The general trend of Indian philosophy is not in the direction of personality but in the direction of the dissolution of the personal in the impersonal. This is especially the case in Vedāntism; but also in Vaishnavism, owing to influence from the former, there is a tendency towards the impersonal.

Looking for a special philosopher of the West who may have influenced Tagore on this point, one finds Rudolf Eucken. Tagore nowhere in his writings makes any reference to Eucken—most of his references in this context are to the Upanishads—but everyone who has acquired some knowledge of Eucken will be aware of Tagore's indebtedness to him. Obviously Eucken's philosophy has lent much of its colour to Tagore's interpretation of the Upanishads.

It is not our business here to give an exposition of parallels and differences between the Western philosopher and the Eastern poet. Only a few points may be stressed. First of all, Eucken had found the unity of life in all-comprising universal personality, and the end of man in the development of a comprehensive and harmonious personality.¹ Further, in the analysis of personality Tagore follows Eucken very closely. For both, the distinctive marks of personality are to be found in freedom, creative activity, ethical character and love.

To be sure, there are differences also. Eucken does not lay the same emphasis on an aesthetic view of life as does Tagore. On the other hand, he has a much greater appreciation than Tagore of Christianity, 'the religion of religions',² as the path to truth. A most important difference is that Eucken emphasises the independence of the spiritual life, whereas Tagore lays the emphasis on its immanence in man. Eucken stresses the necessity of decision and struggle for the appropriation of the spiritual life by man; Tagore lays more stress on its automatic evolution and growth.

¹ See R. Eucken: *Life's Basis and Life's Ideal*, London, 1911, p. xii and *passim*; *The Truth of Religion*, London, 1913, *passim*.

² R. Eucken: *The Truth of Religion*, 517.

The consciousness of an all-comprising personality, according to Tagore, can be dimly felt already in the realm of the physical world, where we have the feeling of being separate from and yet kindred to and united with the universal world of things. It has a deeper hue in our mental life, where there is a separation and continual reunion between our individual mind and the universal world of reason. It widens where there is a separation and combination between the individual will and the universal world of human personalities. It comes to its ultimate meaning where there is the separation and harmony between the individual one in us and the universal one in infinity.¹

'Here we come to the realm of the greatest division in us,' says Tagore, 'the division of the finite and the infinite. In this we become conscious of the relationship between what is in us and what is beyond us; between what is in the moment and what is ever to come.'² The task of man can be said, simply, to be that of realising this unity which, potentially, already exists, but which has to be brought to actual and full reality, *i.e.*, the *self-realisation of man*.

Here is the centre of Tagore's philosophy and religion, the grand theme of all his poetry. 'This has been the subject on which all my writings have dwelt—the joy of attaining the Infinite within the finite', he says.³ And here is the heart of his religion. 'The idea of the humanity of our God, or the divinity of Man the Eternal, is the main subject of this book', he says, in the first chapter of *The Religion of Man*.⁴

In this respect, surely, Tagore is Indian. Here he is treading on Hindu ground. This is also a point where Christianity parts company with him.

To be sure, in Christian mysticism, as in almost all types of mysticism, we meet a tendency to identify human and divine nature. Christian mystics speak of the divine spark, the uncreated divine element in the soul (*apex mentis*, *vertex mentis*, *scintilla animae*, *Seelenburg*, and so on). On the line of Christian mysticism represented by the 'Areopagite', Erigena, Eckhart and the Dutch Jew Spinoza the identification of the human and the divine is almost complete.⁵ We have already pointed out, however, that this is not a Christian but a Greek line of thought.⁶ There is much truth in

¹ *Personality*, 84.

² *Reminiscences*, 238.

³ P. 17.

⁴ Cf. A. Nygren: *Agape and Eros*, II: 2, pp. 415 ff.

⁵ See above, p. 67.

Marcus Ward's opinion regarding these mystics: the more mystic the less Christian, the more Christian the less mystic.¹ On the line leading through St. Augustine, Bernard, St. Francis, Suso, Thomas à Kempis, etc., there is very little of this identification.

'We are not of God, but He made us', St. Augustine says.² 'I asked the whole frame of the world about my God; and it answered me: "I am not He, but He made me."' ³ This, in fact, expresses the truth of the Christian faith on this point. We are God's workmanship, but we are not divine. Man is created by, not born of, God. In the hymn of creation in Genesis it is said that 'God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul'.⁴ Sometimes this has been interpreted along the lines of Greek philosophy, so as to mean that man is 'a child of heaven and earth', his body being of dust and his soul being a breath of the divine spirit.

This interpretation, however, cannot stand careful scrutiny. The 'breath of life', Hebrew *nischmat chajjim*, which God breathed into the nostrils of man, thereby making him 'a living soul', is not identical with God's Spirit. The word used in the Old Testament for God's Spirit is *ruach*. The Greek words which in the New Testament come nearest to these Old Testament terms are *psyche*, mind, soul, and *pneuma*, spirit.⁵ The Spirit of God, according to biblical teaching, is not in man from the beginning. He can *come* to man and take up his abode in man, temporally, or for ever. But He is not a possession of natural man; He is a gift, *sent* into the heart of man. This can be seen already in the Old Testament, although the Old Testament conception of God's Spirit is dim and vague. God's Spirit 'rushed upon' Samson;⁶ it came mightily upon Saul,⁷ Othniel,⁸ Jephthah⁹ and David, after his anointing by Samuel;¹⁰ it rested upon the prophets.¹¹ It is more definitely so in the New Testament. In His 'farewell address' to the Apostles in the Upper Room Christ declares that the Paraclete, or 'Helper', 'even the Holy Spirit', will come to them. He will be given and sent by the Father,¹² or sent by Christ

¹ A. Marcus Ward: *Our Theological Task*, 110.

²⁻³ *Confessions*, 10: 9.

⁴ Gen. 2: 7.

⁵ Cf. H. Wheeler Robinson: *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, 14 ff.

⁶ Judges 14: 6.

⁷ 1 Sam. 11: 6.

⁸ Judges 3: 10.

⁹ Judges 11: 29.

¹⁰ Ps. 16: 13.

¹¹ Isa. 61: 1.

¹² John 14: 16, 26.

from the Father, from whom He proceeds.¹ Also the Apostle Paul says that God 'sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts'.²

In the New Testament we meet with a clear distinction between, on the one hand, 'natural' man, the 'psychic' man, who has only *psyche*, mind, but has not received *pneuma*, the Spirit of God, and, on the other hand, the 'spiritual' man, who, through faith, has received the Spirit of God and thereby become 'a new man', in whom the new, spiritual, eternal, divine life is operating.³ This amounts to saying that man *has* not the Spirit of God, but he can *get* it, thereby becoming 'a new creation'.⁴

Sometimes the Prologue of St. John's Gospel is adduced in support of the idea of natural man's divinity. In my opinion this interpretation rests upon a deficient method of exegesis. For the Prologue must not be isolated from but read in the light of the rest of the Gospel. And if we do so, we shall get a different light on the statements of the Prologue. The main part of the Gospel clearly contradicts the idea of natural man's divinity.

Generally verse 9 of the Prologue is quoted: 'There was the true light, even the light that lighteth every man, coming into the world', which is taken to mean that the divine light is in every man, when he comes into the world. But this verse, most likely, should be understood in the way in which Moffat, and before him the Swedish Bible, read it: 'The real Light, which enlightens every man, was coming then into the world'; for this interpretation is in agreement with the 12th verse of the 8th chapter, where the Incarnate says: 'I am the light of the world: *he who follows Me* will not walk in darkness, he will enjoy the light of life.'

Also verse 10 of the Prologue: 'He was in the world', is adduced, and taken to mean that the Logos (Christ) was immanent in the world before He became incarnate.⁵ But this word seems to mean, most naturally, that He was in the world as incarnate: *cf.* 'He dwelt among us' (verse 14).

Still less am I able to understand the words about those 'which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God' (verse 13) as referring to natural man, meaning that all men are born of God.⁶ The Evangelist says very clearly in the

¹ John 15: 26, 16: 7; *cf.* Wheeler Robinson: *The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit*, 8, 17.

² 1 Gal. 4: 6.

³ 1 Cor. 2: 14; 15: 44; Jas. 3: 15; Jude 19.

⁴ 2 Cor. 5: 17.

⁵ *Cf.* A. J. Appassamy: *Christianity as Bhakti Marga*, 41.

⁶ *Ib.*, 44, 50.

preceding verse that it was to those who 'received Him, to them gave He the right to become the children of God'. The Fourth Gospel nowhere says that man by his natural birth is a child of God. He can *become* a child of God. But for that purpose a new birth is needed, and this birth, according to Christ's word to Nicodemus (3: 3), takes place when the Holy Spirit is given to man.

There is a cleft between God and man, the cleft between the Creator and His creature. This cleft can never be removed or filled up. But it is not unbridgable. On the contrary, it is meant to be bridged over. God has created man 'in His own image'.¹

There is something enigmatic about this statement, and it is no wonder that, in the course of the history of Christian thought, different interpretations have been given to it. It would take us too far to give an account even of the chief points in the history of its interpretation. The differences, mostly, have arisen as a result of the combination of this question with another, *viz.*, the question about man's so-called original status, *i.e.*, his status before the Fall, whether he was created as a perfect being, with perfect goodness (*justitia originalis*), wisdom and immortality, which were lost through the Fall. The Fathers generally took the view that he was created not perfect but perfectible. They made a distinction between 'image' and 'likeness' (*cf.* Gen. 1: 26): the image of God was to be developed, through obedience, into real God-likeness (Irenaeus, Origen, Athanasius, Augustine). Medieval scholasticism, on this foundation, elaborated a complicated theory of man's original status, whereas the Reformers dropped the distinction between 'image' and 'likeness'.

But apart from this question, there has been, from the beginning, an almost unanimous opinion that the divine image in man consists in his equipment with reason and free-will as the framework of his spiritual life. This seems to be the standpoint also in modern theology, although there is a variety in terminology. Nathan Söderblom spoke of man's God-consciousness and conscience, or his consciousness of infinity and the urge of the ideal, as the portals of revelation and organs of communion with God.² The theologians of the Barthian school speak of man's 'addressability' ('*Wortfähigkeit*') and 'responsibility' ('*Verantwortlichkeit*').³ Kraemer sums up the views of modern theology on this question in this way: The

¹ Gen. 1: 26, 27. ² Nathan Söderblom: *The Nature of Revelation*, 117.

³ Emil Brunner: *Nature and Grace*, 11.

image of God consists in that which raises man above nature, in his equipment for communion with God.¹

Interpreted in the light of the New Testament distinction between 'psychic' and 'pneumatic', it seems clear that the image of God may be taken to mean that man is endowed with the capacity of becoming a spiritual, not only a 'psychic' being. In other words: There is in man an organ for receiving the Spirit of God, which implies a possibility of *becoming* a child of God. Taking an analogy from the realm of biology, we may say that in the human spirit there is the possibility given for the conception and birth of a new life. And this possibility is the distinctive mark of man. But this possibility, in order to become a reality, must be fertilised by the Spirit of God. Only then does man get eternal, divine life. And this is the 'new birth'.

But the Bible has more to tell about the situation of man. It tells of a 'Fall', a breaking away from God, a broken fellowship, a perversion of the image of God; it tells of sin and curse, of banishment from God, of captivity in sin, evil and death.

Under no circumstances, therefore, can there be any talk of a 'development' of natural man, of a 'self-realisation' of man. Sin and evil are too formidable obstacles in the way of man.

Tagore also speaks of obstacles. This needs a closer examination. But, before we go to tackle that problem, we must study Tagore's view of man's relation to man.

¹ *Real Encyclopædie für Protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 3, p. 117.

VI

TAGORE'S ETHICAL VIEWS

To Tagore's view of man belong also his views regarding the interrelation of men, his ethics. The centre of Tagore's ethics is the idea of love. We are not mere individuals. At one pole of our being we are united with others, with all, with the universe. Therefore the end of freedom is not an absolutely individual course of our will—that would be absolute selfishness; but unity and harmony with the wills of others—and this is love. For in the spiritual world love is what beauty is in the material world. 'Beauty is the harmony realised in things which are bound by law. Love is the harmony realised in wills which are free.'¹ Beauty is the rhythm of proportions, love is the rhythm of wills which are free.

This harmony with other wills is necessary for our own perfection. We can realise ourselves only in harmony with others.

Love presupposes freedom. For love can never be called forth by compulsion. It must be spontaneous. Freedom, therefore, belongs to the very nature of love. In mutual love we realise the freedom of will in others. 'In friends the will meets our will in fulness of freedom, not in coercion of want or fear; therefore, in this love, our personality finds its highest realisation.'²

Therefore, the value of the individual is not the market value of wealth and power, but the value of love. This is the value that God in His infinite mercy has set upon all His creatures.³ Man's true relationship with the world, therefore, is that of personal love.⁴ Love is the solution of all the contradictions of life. In *Sādhana* Tagore has sung a hymn to love as the harmony of opposites:

In love all contradictions of existence merge themselves and are lost. Only in love are unity and duality not at variance. Love must be one and two at the same time.

Only love is motion and rest in one. Our heart ever changes its place till it finds love, and then it has its rest. But this rest itself is an intense form of activity where utter quiescence and unceasing energy meet at the same point in love.

¹ *Personality*, 101.

² *Ib.*, 100.

³ *Ib.*, 177.

⁴ *Ib.*, 112.

In love, loss and gain are harmonised. In its balance-sheet, credit and debit accounts are in the same column, and gifts are added to gains. In this wonderful festival of creation, this great ceremony of self-sacrifice of God, the lover constantly gives himself up to gain himself in love. Indeed, love is what brings together and inseparably connects both the act of abandoning and that of receiving.

In love, at one of its poles you find the personal, and at the other the impersonal. At one you have the positive assertion—Here I am; and at the other the equally strong denial—I am not. Without this ego what is love? And again, with only this ego how can love be possible?

Bondage and liberation are not antagonistic in love. For love is most free and at the same time most bound. If God were absolutely free there would be no creation. The infinite being has assumed unto himself the mystery of finitude. And in him who is love the finite and the infinite are made one.

Similarly, when we talk about the relative values of freedom and non-freedom, it becomes a mere play of words. It is not that we desire freedom alone, we want thralldom as well. It is the high function of love to welcome all limitations and to transcend them. For nothing is more independent than love, and where else, again, shall we find so much of dependence? In love thralldom is as glorious as freedom.¹

Love 'inseparably connects both the act of abandoning and that of receiving'. It belongs to the very nature of love that it is spontaneously giving; it gives itself in endless gifts. 'But these gifts lose their fullest significance if in them we do not reach that love, which is the giver. To do that, we must have love in our own heart. He who has no love in him values the gifts of his lover only according to their usefulness.'² Perfect harmony of love requires full reciprocity. In such mutual giving and receiving is joy. 'Our highest joy is in love.'³ But this joy is not a mere sentiment; it is truth, 'it is the joy that is at the root of all creation'.⁴

So, to be one with this all-feeling being who pervades the universe as well as our own soul, we must attain to that summit of consciousness.

¹ *Sādhanā*, 114 f.

² *Ib.*, 107.

³ *Personality*, 100.

⁴ *Sādhanā*, 107.

which is love. It is this love which is at the centre of the universe, that makes it possible to live in this world. Tagore quotes a verse from the Upanishads: 'Who could have breathed or moved if the sky were not filled with joy?'¹ Identifying joy with love, he adds: 'It is through the heightening of our consciousness into love, and extending it all over the world, that we can attain *Brahma-vihāra*, communion with the infinite joy.'²

Therefore love is the ultimate meaning of everything around us.³ It is the ultimate truth. The religion of love, consequently, is the perfect religion.

In this respect there has taken place a considerable growth of the conception during the time between the Upanishads and Tagore. For the religion of love as preached by Tagore is not found in the Upanishads. Tagore often refers to them, seeking support in quotations from them, but even a surface study of his writings makes it clear that his own views contain much that transcends the teaching of the Upanishads.

In this respect his translation of the verse we quoted above is significant. The verse in his own transcription runs thus: '*Ko hyevānyāt kaḥ prānyāt yadēsha ākāoa ānandō na syāt.*' This is translated: 'Who could have breathed or moved if the sky were not filled with joy, with love?'⁴ In a previous chapter we have pointed out that Tagore converts the *ānandā* of the Upanishads into love. The Upanishadic verse: 'From joy the world is born', he translates: 'From love the world is born.'⁵ Similarly, the Upanishadic statement that *advaitam* is *ānandam*, he translates: 'The One is Love.'⁶

What has made this conversion of joy into love possible? What has helped Tagore to identify joy and love? Apparently some other currents of thought have joined the old stream and made this identification possible. From where did they come? Tagore himself, probably, would point to the Vaishnava religion, which, in his opinion, represents the Infinite as binding himself at every step to man in the spell of the wonderful rhythm of the finite, thus giving 'his love out in music in his most perfect lyrics of beauty'.⁷

But in the most prominent document of the Vaishnava religion, the *Gītā*, we do not find the religion of love which Tagore preaches. There are beautiful things said in the *Gītā* about unselfishness, kindness and friendliness:

¹ *Ib.*

² See above, p. 17.

³ *Ib.*, 114.

⁷ *Sādhana*, 115.

He who looks upon all as himself in pleasure and in pain—he is considered, O Arjuna, a perfect *Yogin*.¹

He who never hates any being and is kindly and compassionate, who is free from the feeling of 'I' and 'Mine', and who looks upon pleasure and pain alike, and has forbearance; he who is ever content and is steady in contemplation, who is self-restrained and is of firm conviction, and who has consecrated his mind and understanding to me—dear to me is the man who is thus devoted.²

But the dominant note in the *Gītā* is 'detachment': Do not permit your heart to attach itself to anything or anybody in this world! A true *yogin* must practice 'detachment' and freedom from identification with children, wife and home.³ He must be free from love as well as from hatred, from joy as well as from grief; he must work 'without love or hate'.⁴ 'He who neither joys nor hates, neither grieves nor wants, and who has renounced both good and evil—dear to me is the man who is thus devoted.'⁵ Thus self-restraint lays its cold hand over the ethic of the *Gītā*. It could not be otherwise, for the *Gītā* is not concerned about good works, but about making all works harmless for salvation. It fails therefore to reach the idea of positive and active love.⁶ I have already pointed out⁷ that this is due to its underlying Vedāntic philosophy with its *māyā* and *karma* doctrines.

If we compare this teaching with Tagore's fervent exhortation: 'Trust love even if it brings sorrow. Do not close up your heart,'⁸ we see immediately the vast difference. Tagore, like the Christian faith, wants us to give ourselves whole-heartedly and without reservation.

Tagore, however, would not refer so much to the *Gītā*, but first and foremost to the Vaishnavism of Bengal, to Kabīr and his followers, to the Bāṭils and others of the kind. There are some features of the love preached by these sects which have a great resemblance to the religion of Tagore. Undoubtedly he has been influenced by them. This we have already pointed out, as well as the probability of some Christian influence on these sects.⁹

¹ *Bhāgavadgītā*, 6: 32.

² *Ib.*, 12: 13, 14.

³ *Ib.*, 13: 9.

⁴ *Ib.*, 18: 23.

⁵ *Ib.*, 12: 17.

⁶ Cf. S. Estborn: 'The Ethic of the *Gītā* and the Gospel' (*The Way of Christ*, April 1939).

⁷ See above, pp. 65 f.

⁸ *The Gardener*, no. 22.

⁹ See above, pp. 20 f.

But a closer scrutiny of Tagore's religion of love shows that there is more in it than in these Vaishnava sects of Bengal. Their songs and writings are full of the love between the soul and its Supreme Lover. God as 'the Beloved' is the all-dominating theme in their songs.¹ But there is very little of love to the brethren. The love to the Supreme Lover has eclipsed everything else. The neighbour, the brother, scarcely comes within their consideration. We cannot expect, therefore, to find anything of the active, self-giving love to others, which is characteristic of Tagore, and which he has in common with the Christian faith.

The love which we meet in the Gospel has always two dimensions, the vertical and the horizontal: the love to God and the love to the brethren. One of the characteristics of the Christian faith consists primarily in the combination of these two dimensions of love. Separated they can be found elsewhere also. In the Indian *bhakti*, as we have seen, we may meet abundant expressions of the love between the soul and God; the vertical dimension is there. In some Hindu literature again, e.g., in the *Tirukkural*, we find high ethical standards, sometimes even reminding us of Christian ethics; the horizontal dimension is there. But the two are not combined. The love for God in *bhakti* does not issue in real, active love for the brethren; and the ethics of the *Tirukkural* is not given a religious foundation, it is not based on the love of God.

In the Christian faith they have been combined so closely that they cannot be separated without destroying the faith at its very centre. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart . . . and thy neighbour as thyself.'² This combination had taken place already in the Old Testament. The Prophets preached the futility of worship without justice and love in our relationship with our neighbours. 'Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgement roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.'³

The New Testament lays an overwhelming emphasis on this. 'If anyone declares, "I love God", and yet hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who will not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot possibly love the God whom he has never seen. And we get this command from Him, that he who loves God is to love his

¹ Cf. Evelyn Underhill, Introduction, *Poems of Kabir*, p. xxix.

² Mark 12: 30 f. ³ Amos 5: 23. Cf. Isaiah 1: 11-17; Ezek. 45: 9 ff.

brother also.'¹ And Christ declares that we cannot serve Him except by serving His brothers: 'I tell you truly, in so far as you did it to one of these My brothers, even to the least of them, you did it to Me.'² We cannot be in a right relationship with God, if we do not want to put right our relationship with our brothers. Christ says: 'If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.'³ St. Paul seldom used the word 'love' for our relationship with God; he reserved that word for God's attitude towards us; our attitude to God he termed 'faith'. But the two-dimensional relationship remains the same: 'If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing.'⁴

Above all, the completion and perfection of this combination of the two dimensions of love took place in the life and work of Christ. 'Hereby know we love,' says St. John, 'because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.'⁵ In the Christian faith the two dimensions of love can never be separated, because they were indissolubly united in the life and person of Christ.

To this height Tagore's views and teachings on love do not reach. Yet the two dimensions are there, organically combined. It seems to me that the most significant difference between the teaching of Vaishnavism and that of Tagore, in this respect, consists just in this combination of the two aspects of love.

Sometimes Tagore refers to Buddha as the teacher of universal brotherly love. He quotes a Buddhistic text, stating that 'he who wants to reach this stage (*Brahma-vihāra*) shall deceive none, entertain no hatred for anybody, and never wish to injure through anger. He shall have measureless love for all creatures.'⁶ In a

¹ John 4: 20, 21 (Moffatt translation).

² Matt. 25: 40 (Moffatt translation).

³ *Ib.*, 5: 23 f.

⁴ 1 John 3: 16.

⁵ 1 Cor. 13: 1-3.

⁶ *Sādhana*, 106.

previous chapter we have already pointed out that the Buddhist conception of love is not the same as the Christian ideal of active and self-forgetting love.¹ The above quotation corroborates that statement fully. Love is not commended for its own sake, but for the salvation of one's own soul—in order to 'reach *Brahma-vihāra*'. And it is more a sentiment, a mind of goodwill, than love active in helpful service.

Tagore's own conception of love is much greater and richer than that of Buddhism. Occasionally he too commends love to all as a means of self-realisation; the spontaneity of love is thereby sometimes obscured. But a study of his discourses on love can leave us in no doubt that the love he preaches is a freely forth-welling and self-giving love. It is not a mere sentiment, nor only an idea; it is active love; it has a strong social element in it. The revelation of unity which we find in beauty is passive, he says; the revelation of unity which we find in love is active, because it belongs to the very nature of love that it is spontaneously giving.² And its giving finds its true expression in fruitful service. This is beautifully brought out in a prayer in *Gitanjali*:

This is my prayer to thee, my Lord—

give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.³

The soul cannot live on its own internal feelings and imaginations. It must apply itself in action.⁴ Activity is a test of the soundness and genuineness of our spiritual life. If the test of action is removed, if our realisation grows purely subjective, then it may become travelling in a desert in the night, going round and round the same circle, imagining all the while that we are following the straight path of purpose.⁵

God Himself is active. Through our labour in active love we are united with Him and become His co-workers. Our union with the Being whose activity is world-wide and who dwells in the heart of humanity cannot be a passive one. In order to be united with Him we have to 'divest our work of selfishness and become *visvakarma*, "the world-worker", we must work for all.'⁶ This *visvakarma*-character of our activity does not mean that we should work for a countless number of people. 'All work that is good, however small in

¹ See above, pp. 25 f.

⁴ *Sādhana*, 125.

² *Personality*, 101.

⁵ *The Religion of Man*, 87.

⁶ *The Religion of Man*, 69.

³ *Gitanjali*, 36.

extent, is universal in character', and makes for the realisation of *visvakarma*.¹ This is in agreement with the word of Jesus that 'whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water' shall not be without reward.²

As love is of universal character it has to be extended to all, *i.e.*, it must break down and traverse all barriers and boundaries of caste, class, nation and race. The will is good only when it is 'freed from all limitations', when 'its scope is extended to all men and all time'.³ Its work is always, on principle, a *visvakarma*-work. Love unites and embraces all. Tagore is an enthusiastic preacher of the brotherhood of all men. In a speech to students he is reported as having said: 'The downtrodden and the despised, who have become callous to insults and oblivious of even the rights of their humanity, must be taught the meaning of the word "brother"'.⁴ In a poem he prays:

Give me the strength never to disown the poor
or bend my knees before insolent might.⁵

We meet in Tagore's writings a love for the poor and downtrodden, which is in line with the Gospel, and a social feeling and a care for the outcastes, which are quite unusual in traditional Hinduism.

Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet
where live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

When I try to bow to thee,
my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth
where thy feet rest among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

Pride can never approach to where thou walkest
in the clothes of the humble
among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

My heart can never find its way
to where thou keepest company with the companionless
among the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost.⁶

¹ *The Religion of Man*, 69.

² Matt 10: 42.

³ *Personality*, 83.

⁴ Durlab Singh: *Tagore, The Sentinel of the East*, 138.

⁵ *Gitanjali*, no. 36.

⁶ *Ib.*, no. 10; cf. *Poems*, no. 100.

In another poem he confesses, in words which probably contain a reminiscence from the Gospel:

Thou art the Brother amongst my brothers,
but I heed them not, I divide not my earnings with them,
thus sharing my all with thee.¹

Tagore has absolutely no regard for a selfish piety, which is occupied only with its own devotion, forgetful and even disdainful of the poor who have to work for their sustenance. How totally different from the traditional Hindu ideal of a religious man his own view is we can see in a poem in *Gitanjali*:

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!
Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple
with doors all shut?
Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground
and where the path-maker is breaking stones.
He is with them in sun and in shower,
and his garment is covered with dust.
Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the
dusty soil!

Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found?
Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of
creation; he is bound with us all for ever.

Come out of thy meditation and leave aside thy flowers and
incense!
What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained?
Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.²

Professor Radhakrishnan interprets the words: 'He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking stones', as expressing the Vedāntic doctrine of God's all-pervasiveness. This doctrine, no doubt, was held by Tagore, but he is not concerned with that in this poem. Here the whole emphasis is on serving God in useful work and in sharing the burden of the poor labourer who is toiling hard in the sweat of his brow. There is

¹ *Gitanjali*, no. 77. Cf. Matt. 25: 42-45.

² *Gitanjali*, no. 11.

a poem of Kabir among those translated by Tagore which has a slight resemblance with the above:

Tell your beads, paint your forehead with the mark of your God,
and wear matted locks long and showy:
but a deadly weapon is in your heart,
and how shall you have God? ¹

The criticism and the scorn for the proud and presumptuous piety of professional 'saints' Tagore has in common with Kabir. But the emphasis on active love and brotherly fellowship with the labourer in his hard work is altogether missing in the medieval poem.

A real, almost verbally exact, parallel to Tagore's poem is found in an apocryphal saying of Jesus: 'Cleave the wood, and I am there; lift the stone, and you will find Me.' These words too, although, taken in isolation, they admit of a pantheistic interpretation, should surely not be so interpreted, but just in the sense of the Gospel: God is worshipped not in vain temple-service but by useful work of brotherly love.

Tagore's plea for such service also reminds us of Martin Luther's criticism of vain worship and of his teaching that sweeping the floor or milking the cow diligently is a much better worship of God than rattling off masses of prayers.² I can hardly think that Tagore had studied Martin Luther, but this similarity is indicative of the fact that on some points the spirit of the Gospel has got into his very blood.³

A worship of God which does not care to help the poor and the suffering is of no avail. In this India, where such colossal amounts of money and labour have been spent on wonderful temples, Tagore declares that God is not in the king's temple even though 'twenty millions of gold went to the making of that marvel of art, and it was consecrated to God with costly rites', for the money that was spent on it should have been used for the thousands of people who had no shelter and who 'stood vainly asking for help at your door.'⁴ Professor Radhakrishnan⁵ rightly finds a parallel between this view

¹ *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, no. 67.

² Luther's *Werke*, Weimar Ausgabe, Vol. XXXVIII, p. 364.

³ Cf. the similarity and the difference between Tagore and the *Gītā* on this point, which I have discussed above, p. 109.

⁴ *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 34.

⁵ *The Philosophy of Tagore*, 77.

and the word of Christ: 'I tell you truly, in so far as you did it to one of these My brothers; even to the least of them, you did it to Me.'¹

Tagore had his eyes opened to the misery of the poor, especially the poor village people of Bengal, when he in his thirtieth year took charge of the family estates at Shileidah. Here for the first time he came into close contact with the village people of Bengal. He travelled about by boat from place to place in the course of his work, and little by little he made friends with the villagers. He saw their difficulties, he began to understand their needs, and he attempted to help them. In spite of great disappointments he did not allow himself to be discouraged, and many years later his efforts took the shape of the rural reconstruction centre at Srineketan.²

These years at Shileidah were of great importance in the development of Tagore's social sense. But the question naturally arises: What made him able to see the need of those poor villagers? So many others had seen them before him, but had not seen their need. Some secret influence had brought about a change within him that enabled him to see with new eyes. There can scarcely be more than one answer to this question. It is his acquaintance with Christian social ideas that has opened his eyes. And also in the development of his means and methods for helping the poor this influence was at work. We have already pointed out what a great role the influence of Tolstoy played in this respect.³

It is strange that the country which has developed a religious philosophy of the unity of all has developed, at the same time, a social system with the most rigid classification of people, and with insurmountable barriers between different groups of people. The metaphysical idea of unity has not proved strong enough to prevent the system from growing more and more hard and stiff. But the religion of love, which Tagore preached, cannot tolerate a system which separates one group of people from the others and makes one man the slave of another. When Jesus dined with publicans and sinners this was an act which was horrible in the eyes of His religious contemporaries;⁴ likewise in choosing to go to Samaria, not disdaining to be a guest of the despised Samaritans, He dealt a heavy

¹ Matt. 25: 40 (Moffatt translation).

² Marjorie Sykes: *Rabindranath Tagore*, 45.

³ See above, p. 32.

⁴ Matt. 9: 10 ff.; Luke 19: 1 ff.

blow to traditional views and customs.¹ He told a proud Jew the story of the good Samaritan,² who helped a Jew who had been slain by robbers. This story was not only meant as a thorn in the puffed-up flesh of Jewish national pride; it was a hammer that has proved heavy enough to break down very solid walls of man-made barriers between different classes, different nations, different races. Inspired by this spirit St. Paul wrote: 'There is no room for Jew or Greek, there is no room for slave or freeman, there is no room for male and female: you are all one in Christ Jesus.'³ St. Paul did not work out a programme for social reforms in the Roman Empire of his time, but this principle of equality and brotherly oneness was practised in the Christian congregations. It worked with the power of a leaven, and in due time it expelled slavery not only from the Roman Empire, but also from the Germanic nations, when the Gospel invaded them. It is significant that in a law which was promulgated in Sweden after that nation had been Christianised we read: 'Henceforth there shall be no slaves in this country, for, as Christ has redeemed us freemen, He has also redeemed the slaves.' The spirit of freedom and equality has had a hard task among the people of the West, but it has been constantly revolting against slavery and oppression.

Tagore preached freedom, brotherly oneness and equality. And because the caste-system, with all its barriers, its grading of people and its degradation and oppression of the outcastes, is incompatible with these ideas, he combatted it vehemently. He stood for the complete abolition of the caste-system. At Santiniketan he flung open the doors of his institutions to the children of the outcastes.

Whatever have been the merits of the caste-system in the past, today it is a positive hindrance to spiritual growth within and to progress without. In Tagore's opinion it failed to realise that in human beings differences are not like the physical barriers of mountains, fixed for ever—they are fluid with life's flow, they are changing their courses and their shapes and volume. The caste-system is not creative. All its emphasis is on the negative side of the individual. It is in conflict with the perfect truth in man.⁴ In Tagore's opinion the regeneration of the Indian people 'directly and perhaps solely depends upon the removal of this condition'.⁵

¹ Luke 9: 51 ff.; John 4: 4 ff.

² Luke 10: 45 ff.

³ Gal. 3: 28 (Moffatt translation).

⁴ *Creative Unity*, 97.

⁵ Quoted from S. Radhakrishnan: *The Philosophy of Tagore*, 126.

From America the poet wrote a letter to his countrymen, asking them whether the freedom they aspire to is one of true character or one of external conditions only. Have they acquired a true love of freedom? 'Are they ready to make space in their society for the minds of their children to grow up in the idea of human dignity, unhindered by restrictions that are unjust and irrational?'¹ Tagore admits that life has its inequalities, 'but they are natural and in harmony with our vital functions'.² 'By squeezing human beings in the grip of an inelastic system and forcibly holding them fixed we have ignored the laws of life and growth. We have forced living souls into a permanent passivity, making them incapable of moulding circumstance to their own intrinsic design, and of mastering their own destiny.'³

The greatest shame of the caste-system is the oppression of the outcastes. Tagore was a true advocate of their cause. In one of his poems he retells the story of Satyakama, but with a slight, yet significant, change of one detail. In the traditional form of the story the son of the outcaste woman, when asked by the teacher about his caste, gives the reply that he does not know, because he was the son of a woman who had had many masters but no husband. The teacher replies: 'Only a Brahmin can speak the truth so frankly.' But in Tagore's version the teacher's reply has got this form: 'Best of all Brahmins art thou, my child. Thou hast the noblest heritage of truth.'⁴ It is truth, not birth, that makes a true Brahmin.

In another poem Tagore prayed for the outcaste:

O my hapless country, those whom thou has insulted—
To them shalt thou have to be equal in thy humiliation,
Those whom thou hast deprived of the rights of man.
Keep them standing before thee, not taking them in thy lap.
All of them shalt thou have to equal in humiliation.⁵

There can be no doubt that in such words we hear the voice of the Christian spirit of brotherliness and freedom. Although there are some traces of relaxation of the strict observance of caste with teachers like Rāmānanda and Kabīr, probably due to Mohammadan influence, there is no evidence that any attempt was made to overturn caste. The followers of Rāmānanda are still strictly orthodox in all caste

¹ *Creative Unity*, 136 f.

²⁻³ *Ib*, 138.

⁴ *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 64.

⁵ Quoted from Durlab Singh: *Tagore, the Sentinel of the East*, 133.

matters. 'Not until Christian criticism was brought to bear at the beginning of the nineteenth century was there any definite attempt made to show that caste as a social system is cruel, inhuman and immoral.'¹

The universality of love must express itself not only in a nation of brothers but also in a brotherhood of nations. The reconciliation of nations, of races, of East and West has never had a more passionate advocate than it had in Tagore. His *Visvabhārati*, the international university at Santiniketan, is an outcome and a symbol of his glowing faith in the brotherhood of nations and races. He earnestly entreated the poets of the West to sing with all the great power of music which they had, 'that the East and the West are ever in search of each other, and that they must meet not merely in the fullness of physical strength, but in fullness of truth'.²

He had a great admiration for much of the culture in the West, not only for 'its marvellous training of intellect' but still more for 'the active love of humanity and the spirit of martyrdom for the cause of justice and truth' which he had met there. In his opinion, the West owes its true greatness to 'its spirit of service devoted to the welfare of man'. Because of his love for the West he spoke 'with a personal feeling of pain and sadness about the collective power which is guiding the helm of Western civilization'.³ His deep love of humanity made his voice tremble with wrath when he denounced the aggressive nationalism of the West as well as of Japan as a crime against humanity. There has been in the West a terrible denial of the best of its ideals, a denial of the spirit of Christ, and the whole world will have to suffer for it. It is strange that the Christian spirit should speak its warnings to the West from India. 'The future historian of the world', says Mr. D. S. Sarma, 'will have to record how the grave warnings of this prophet of humanity, hailing from India, fell on deaf ears, and how Japan and some of the nations of Europe paid for their pride and inhumanity in blood and tears and destruction on a vast scale before the air which they had fouled with their misdeeds was purged and cleansed.'⁴

It is earnestly to be hoped that his own country will pay more heed to his warnings than did the nationalistically poisoned nations

¹ J. N. Farquhar: *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, 325.

² *Creative Unity*, 110.

³ *Ib.*, 104 f.

⁴ D. S. Sarma, *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, 344.

in the West and the East, and not allow her own glowing nationalism to land her in reckless civil strife and bloodshed.

There is scarcely any point in Tagore's teaching in which his views come so near to the Christian faith as in his ethic. The heart of it is love, spontaneous, active, self-sacrificing love to the brothers—to all, irrespective of caste, class, nation, and race. The universal and social character of love is strongly emphasised. And this love has its root in the love that is at the centre of existence, in the love of God. Our love to God and to our brothers, therefore, is one and the same love, going out in two dimensions. Apparently the Christian influence on Tagore has been strongest in the realm of ethics. In the opinion of the present writer, this is the case with educated India in general today.

VII

TAGORE'S VIEW OF SIN AND EVIL

In the account of his basic religious experience Tagore makes mention of his self being 'rampant during the glare of day'.¹ His 'vision' was made possible only through the obliteration of his self, which generally mingled with everything he perceived. The shades of the evening had put his self into the background and thus enabled him to see the world in its true aspect.² Afterwards he repeatedly tried the effect of deliberately suppressing his self 'and viewing the world as a mere spectator, and was invariably rewarded with a sense of special pleasure'.³ This 'viewing the world as a mere spectator', as we have pointed out,⁴ obviously means to look at it with a disinterested mind, without selfish desire or demand. This disinterested attitude is a necessary condition for the revelation of the beauty of nature. It eludes those who want to possess the world with greedy hearts.

Why did the flower fade?
I pressed it to my heart with anxious love,
That is why the flower faded.

Why did the stream dry up?
I put a dam across it to have it for my use,
That is why the stream dried up.⁵

Generally the self is not only 'rampant', mingling itself into everything perceived, but also egoistically desirous of possession. There is no trace of a sense of guilt in Tagore's account of this experience, and it must by no means be paralleled with the Christian consciousness of sin. Yet, in this view of the self, we find the root of that which Tagore termed 'sin'.

Let us first consider what the self, in Tagore's view, is. 'At one pole of my being I am one with stocks and stones. There I have to acknowledge the rule of universal law. . . . But at the other pole of my being I am separate from all. There I have broken through the

^{1,2} See above, p. 42.

⁴ See above, p. 54.

³ *Reminiscences*, 217.

⁵ *The Gardener*, no. 52.

cordon of equality and stand alone as individual. I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable. The whole weight of the universe cannot crush out this individuality of mine.¹ With these words Tagore, in his Harvard University Lectures, introduced the problem of self.

This separateness as an individual is considered by man as his most precious possession. He is absolutely bankrupt if he is deprived of this speciality, this individuality which is the only thing he can call his own. Therefore he is apt to undergo pain and suffering and to commit sins for its sake. It has led man to shame and crime and death. 'Yet it is dearer to him than any paradise where the self lies securely slumbering in perfect innocence in the womb of mother nature.'²

This constant striving to maintain the separateness of self is in accordance with the inner meaning of the universe. 'The universal is ever seeking its consummation in the unique.'³ Only through our separateness from the universe can we gain it more truly than if we were lying within its breast unconscious of our distinctiveness. The birth of the self is like the birth of a child. The relation of the unborn child to its surroundings in the mother's womb is very intimate, but it is without its final meaning. There its wants are ministered to in all their details, but its greatest want remains unfulfilled. It must be born into the world of light and space and freedom of action. Its limbs and sense-organs have their only meaning in the freedom of the air and light.⁴ In the womb of the mother it is one with her, but in order to see her, embrace her and have fellowship with her it must be separated from her.⁵ In the same manner the birth of self must take place if man is to gain his full meaning in the universe. The desire we have to keep our uniqueness intact is really the desire of the universe acting in us.⁶

The separateness of self, consequently, is only a means to a higher end: that of fellowship and love, of harmony. This is the positive significance of self.

But there is the temptation of self to maintain separateness as an end of its own, to accumulate possessions for its own use, to take every opportunity of self-gratification and self-aggrandisement, regardless of the whole. Then the harmony is broken. This is

¹ *Sādhana*, 69.

^{2,3} *Ib.*, 70.

⁴ *Personality*, 85.

⁵ *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 10; *The Religion of Man*, 199.

⁶ *Sādhana*, 70.

egotism; and egotism is sin. 'There are uncontrolled exaggerations of passions that upset all balance in our personality. They obscure the harmony between the spirit of the individual man and the spirit of the universal Man; and we give them the name sin.'¹

As diseases disturb the harmony of the functions of our physical life, and intellectual errors injure the harmony of relationship between our rational mind and the universe of reason, so egotism obstructs spiritual harmony and true freedom. Egotism is a great danger to our development as real personalities. Our desires limit the scope of our self-realisation.² 'Thy desire at once puts out the light from the lamp it touches with its breath. It is unholy—take not thy gifts through its unclean hands. Accept only what is offered by sacred love.'³

The consciousness of personality begins with the feeling of the separateness from all, but it has its fulfilment in the feeling of unity with all.⁴ There must be a balanced harmony between the self and the universe. 'But the life in which the consciousness of separation takes the first place and of unity the second place, and therefore where the personality is narrow and dim in the light of truth—this is the life of self. But the life in which the consciousness of unity is the primary and separateness the secondary factor, and therefore the personality is large and bright in truth—this is the life of soul. The whole object of man is to free his personality of self into the personality of soul, to turn his inward forces into the forward movement towards the infinite, from the contraction of self in desire into the expansion of soul in love.'⁵

The self is obtrusive and shameless. It is not easily put in its right place.

I came out alone on my way to my tryst.
But who is this that follows me in the silent dark?
I move aside to avoid his presence
but I escape him not.
He makes the dust rise from the earth with his swagger;
he adds his loud voice to every word that I utter.
He is my own little self, my lord, he knows no shame;
but I am ashamed to come to thy door in his company.⁶

¹ *The Religion of Man*, 181. ² *Sādhana*, 111. ³ *Gitanjali*, no. 9.

⁴ Cf. R. Eucken: *The Truth of Religion*, 93.

⁵ *Personality*, 97 f.

⁶ *Gitanjali*, no. 30.

The self hinders our extension of consciousness, setting up the disunion and arrogance of exclusiveness.

He whom I enclose with my name is weeping in this dungeon.
I am ever busy building this wall all around;
and as this wall goes up into the sky day by day
I lose sight of my true being in its dark shadow.

I take pride in this great wall,
and I plaster it with dust and sand
lest a least hole should be left in this name;
and for all the care I take I lose sight of my true being.¹

By setting up selfish standards we become prisoners, fettered by our own desires. In order to realise our own true nature in freedom and love we must make sacrifices, we must learn the art of renunciation,² not a renunciation of this life for another, in a remote heaven, but for a richer and higher enjoyment of this life. Tagore's renunciation is not negative but positive. When man discovers that his own self is a part of a greater reality he will find 'generous opportunities of enjoyment in renunciation'.³

Tagore has given a beautiful expression to this idea in his poem on 'The Least Little Grain of Gold':

I had gone a-begging from door to door in the village path,
when thy golden chariot appeared in the distance like a gorgeous
dream,
and I wondered who was this King of all kings!

My hopes rose high and methought my evil days were at an end,
and I stood waiting for alms to be given unasked
and for wealth scattered on all sides in the dust.

The chariot stopped where I stood.
Thy glance fell on me and thou camest down with a smile.
I felt that the luck of my life had come at last.
Then of a sudden thou didst hold out thy right hand and say:
'What hast thou to give to me?'

Ah, what a kingly jest was it to open thy palm to a beggar to beg!
I was confused and stood undecided, and then from my wallet
I slowly took out the least little grain of corn and gave it to thee.

¹ *Ib.*, no. 29.

² *Personality*, 88.

³ *The Religion of Man*, 233.

But how great my surprise when at the day's end
 I emptied my bag on the floor to find a least little grain of gold
 among the poor heap.
 I bitterly wept and wished that I had had the heart
 to give thee my all.¹

Tagore was an advocate of the simplification of life for the sake of the enrichment of life through freedom and love. 'Only let me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music', he prays in *Gitanjali*.² He believed in a certain amount of poverty as a means of spiritual growth. 'Should we not admit that poverty is the school in which man had his best training? . . . Poverty brings us into complete touch with life and the world, for living richly is living mostly by proxy, and thus living in a world of lesser reality.'³ Wealth, in his opinion, is a golden cage in which the children of the rich are bred into artificial deadening.

The child who is decked with prince's robes
 and who has jewelled chains round his neck
 loses all pleasure in his play;
 his dress hampers him at every step.
 In fear that it may be frayed, or stained with dust
 he keeps himself from the world, and is afraid even to move.
 Mother, it is no gain, thy bondage of finery,
 if it keep one shut up from the healthful dust of the earth,
 if it rob one of the right of entrance to the great fair
 of common human life.⁴

In his school at Santiniketan he provided for a certain bareness of furniture and materials, 'not because it is poverty, but because it leads to personal experience of the world'.⁵ He proposed that men should have some limited period of their life specially reserved for the life of primitive man.⁶

In this plea for renunciation Tagore believed himself to be in full agreement with the forest saints of ancient India. 'They were seekers after truth, for the sake of which they lived in an atmosphere of purity but not of Puritanism, of the simple life but not the life of self-mortification.'⁷ Like Kālidāsa he felt his mind tortured by the luxury and the complicated civilisation of urban life.⁸

¹ *Gitanjali*, no. 50.

² *Ib.*, no. 7.

³ *Personality*, 121.

⁴ *Gitanjali*, no. 8.

^{5,6} *Personality*, 122.

^{7,8} *The Religion of Man*, 167.

In a poem in *Fruit-Gathering* he tells the story of Ragunath, who, proud of his wealth, came to the great Sikh teacher Govinda offering him 'a poor present' of a pair of gold bangles with costly stones. One of the bangles slipped from the hands of the teacher and rolled down into the waters of the Jumna. 'Alas', screamed Ragunath, and jumped into the stream. After having searched in vain until the daylight faded away he came back to the teacher tired and dripping. He panted and said: 'I can still get it back if you show me where it fell.' The teacher took up the remaining bangle and throwing it into the water said: 'It is there.'¹ Tagore refers to the renunciation preached by Buddha,² and the disinterested work commended in the teaching of the *Gītā*, in support of his view.³

The suppression of the egoistically obtrusive self is a necessity for the spiritual growth of our personality. This, however, causes conflict with the laws of the natural world. In the natural world rules the law of the survival of the fittest. But in the spiritual world this law has a quite different meaning. 'Here', says Tagore, 'comes the greatest suffering of the dualism in man, the dualism of the world of nature and of the world of soul.'⁴ To break the power of self is a hard and painful task. In a poem in *Gitanjali* we find Tagore's confession of this conflict within him:

Obstinate are the trammels, but my heart aches
when I try to break them.

Freedom is all I want, but to hope for it
I feel ashamed.

I am certain that priceless wealth is in thee,
and that thou art my best friend,
but I have not the heart to sweep away the tinsel,
that fills my room.

The shroud that covers me is a shroud of dust and death;
I hate it, yet hug it in love.

My debts are large, my failures great,
my shame secret and heavy;
yet when I come to ask for my good, I quake in fear
lest my prayer be granted.⁵

¹ *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 12.

² *Sādhana*, 77.

³ *Ib.*, 78.

⁴ *Personality*, 86.

⁵ *Gitanjali*, no. 28.

Professor Radhakrishnan¹ has drawn attention to the similarity of this situation to that of St. Paul: 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?'² and to that described by St. Augustine in his well-known words in the *Confessions*: 'But I wretched, most wretched, in the very commencement of my early youth, had begged chastity of Thee, and said, "Give me chastity and continency, only not yet." For I feared lest Thou shouldst hear me soon, and soon cure me of the disease of concupiscence, which I wished to have satisfied, rather than extinguished.'³

Obviously Tagore's experience of the evilness of the life of self has deepened considerably since the time of his basic religious experience. In a letter to C. F. Andrews in 1914, he reveals how painful he found this task: 'I know that I must pass through death. God knows, it is the death-pang that is tearing open my heart. It is hard to part with the old self. One does not know, until the time comes, how far it had spread its roots, and into what unexpected, unconscious depths it had sent its thirsty fibres draining out the precious juice of life.'⁴

This may be an experience common to all who seriously attempt to lead a spiritual life. Yet it is remarkable that Tagore gives it the name of *sin*. 'The evil which hurts the natural man is pain, but that which hurts his soul has been given a special name, it is sin. . . . Crime is against man, sin is against the divine in us.'⁵ He is also quite definite about the fact that 'sin is not one mere action but it is an attitude of life.'⁶ It is worth noting that the more the divine, in Tagore's conception, took the shape of a personal God, the more clearly did he feel sin as personal 'debt', as 'a shame', as a 'barrier' separating him from God. Sin 'is the innermost barrier that keeps us apart from our God, setting up disunion and the arrogance of exclusiveness'.⁷ In his later years he seems to have felt the need of forgiveness and mercy.⁸ In a meditation over a prayer, composed of words from Sanskrit texts, he said: 'We have to be born into this great idea of the Father. That is the end and object of man, the fulfilment of his life. Though it is true that we are eternally related to our Father, yet there is some barrier, which prevents the full realisation of this truth, and this is the greatest source of suffering to

¹ S. Radhakrishnan: *The Philosophy of Tagore*, 9f.

² Rom. 7: 24.

³ Augustine: *Confessions*, 8: 17.

⁴ C. F. Andrews: *Letters to a Friend*, 42.

^{5,6} *Personality*, 86 f.

⁷ *Sādhana*, 111.

⁸ *Poems*, nos. 57 and 130.

man.'¹ A few pages further on in the same meditation he cries out: 'O God, my Father, the world of sins remove from me. When this life of self wants to get everything for itself, then it gets knock after knock, because it is unnatural, because its true life is the life of freedom, because it hurts its wings against the prison cage. . . . From this comes our suffering, and we say: "Break open this prison. I do not want this self." "Break all the sins, selfish desires, cravings of self, and own me as your child, your child, not the child of this world of death."' ²

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that this prayer, clad in the Christian idea of the Fatherhood of God, is influenced by the Gospel. To some extent Christian influence has deepened Tagore's conception of sin.

According to Dr. Appasamy, 'it must be said that this sense of sin is not very deep among Hindus generally. The eager desire for forgiveness is not one of the driving-forces in the religious life of India.'³ He finds several reasons for this. The shallow conception of forgiveness in Hinduism—through pilgrimages, bathing in sacred rivers, the uttering of *mantras* and a frequent repetition of God's name and the like—will create a shallow conception of sin. The doctrine of *karma* plays a most important role in the thought of both the man-in-the-street and the educated man. The problem of getting rid of *karma* is far more pressing than the problem of getting rid of sin. The idea that all that happens in the world is God's doing is deeply rooted in the Hindu mind. The Hindu doctrine of God tends to make Him the author of everything, both good and evil. It is forgotten that there is such a thing as man's evil will, constantly thwarting God's purposes. Lastly there is in Hinduism, especially among the *bhaktas* following the *Bhāgavat Purāna*, the inclination to make religious experience a highly emotional thing. The failure to experience religious thrills troubles them much more than the failure to walk in the path of virtue. All these things combine to bring about a weak and shallow conception of sin.⁴

In Tagore's religion almost all of these things are absent. We have already pointed out what a role the influence of Christian culture has played in the removal of such things, thereby paving the way for a truer and deeper religious and ethical conception.⁵

¹ *Personality*, 161; cf. *Poems*, no. 25.

² *Personality*, 163 f.; cf. *Sādhanā*, 38 f., and *Poems*, no. 56.

³ A. J. Appasamy: *The Gospel and India's Heritage*, 97.

⁴ *Ib.*, 97 f.

⁵ See above, p. 66.

Especially do we find in the mature religious conception of Tagore an ethical element which we missed in the earlier stages of his religious development.¹ Hinduism is individualistic. It knows only one dimension, the vertical, in its religious relationship. It is concerned about God, about Him only. The neighbour, the brother, does not come into account in the religious problem. The Christian faith, as we have pointed out,² has two dimensions, inseparably connected with each other: God and the brother. This has a bearing upon the conception of sin. The Christian conception of sin is never 'purely' religious; it is always ethically qualified, it is an ethico-religious conception. In Tagore's mature conception this ethical aspect of sin is implied, although seldom expressly stated. His strong emphasis on egotism as an injury to the harmony of love implies this ethical aspect.

The conclusion that Tagore's conception of sin, to some extent, is influenced by Christian thought is almost inevitable. Yet we must repeat: only to some extent. His conception of sin and evil is not identical with that of the Christian faith. This is obvious in many ways.

Certainly, Tagore avoids the usual Hindu ways of explaining the origin of evil. Generally speaking, there are three ways in which Hinduism conceives of the origin of sin and evil. The origin of sin is a mystery. How could anything which God created good become evil? Saiva Siddhānta and some other Hindu sects try to avoid the difficulty of the problem by assuming that evil, '*mala*', is from eternity like God Himself. Vedānta and other idealistic philosophies take the opposite course of denying the real existence of evil; evil is only an illusion caused by ignorance; it belongs only to the world of '*māyā*', illusion. Other theories make God Himself responsible for evil, assuming that evil, '*taṃas*', is one part ('*guṇa*', 'strand') of God's own nature, out of which evil beings are created.³

The Christian faith can approve of none of these theories. To assume the eternity of evil is incompatible with the sovereignty of God. On the other hand, evil is too formidable a reality to be declared an illusion. Least of all can God Himself be conceived of as the origin of evil; such an idea is totally incompatible with the holy love which is radically opposed to any kind of evil. The Christian doctrine finds the ultimate possibility of sin and evil in the

¹ See above, p. 54.

² See above, p. 114.

³ Cf. *Bhāgavadgītā*, 14: 3-8, 16: 6.

gift of freedom, the freedom of choosing the way of God's will or that of one's own, of deciding for or against God. But as soon as we come to this point our investigation must make a halt. For at the point of freedom we touch the eternal, the infinite which 'cannot be traced out'. Freedom, which is the ultimate condition of personality, contains an element of irrationality, which admits of no further investigation by means of logic. This is also the standpoint taken by Tagore. 'Frankly, I acknowledge that I cannot satisfactorily answer any questions about evil', he admits.¹

The ultimate possibility of evil he finds in man's freedom, which is the distinctive mark of humanity. 'Like all artists he has the freedom to make mistakes, to launch into desperate adventures contradicting and torturing his psychology or psychological normality. This freedom is a divine gift lent to mortals who are untutored and undisciplined; and therefore the path of their creative progress is strewn with debris of devastation, and stages of their perfection haunted by apparitions of startling deformities.'²

This statement deserves careful study, for it reveals Tagore's innermost view of sin and evil. The possibility of evil is given with the gift of freedom. But it is significant that it is a freedom 'to make mistakes'. This expression is not chosen at random. It points to the nature of evil as conceived of by Tagore. Evil is '*avidyā*', ignorance. Referring to the typical thought of India, Tagore maintains that 'it is only *avidyā* which makes the self our fetter by making us think that it is an end in itself, and by preventing our seeing that it contains the idea that transcends its limit'.³

In Western thought also there has been a strand of similar type ever since the time of Socrates, who held the view that any evil had its root in ignorance of good. But in the Christian faith one has always felt this to be a superficial view of evil. There is something more serious and mysterious at its root.

The *avidyā*-aspect of evil is very closely associated with the *māyā*-doctrine, which logically renders evil unreal. Tagore comes very near to this view when he asserts that deliverance from evil 'is not in destroying anything that is positive and real, for that cannot be possible, but that which is negative, which obstructs our vision of truth'.⁴

¹ *The Religion of Man*, 107.

² *Sādhana*, 72 f.; cf. *ib.*, 32.

³ *ib.*, 54.

⁴ *Sādhana*, 72.

Evil, after all, is only clouds 'which obstruct our vision', or it is 'mistakes' on men's path of creative progress, 'deformities' on 'the stages of their perfection'.

The doctrine of man's sinfulness, in Tagore's opinion, is a gloomy heresy; and to say that man can be saved only by the special grace of God 'is like saying that the nature of the seed is to remain enfolded within its shell, and it is only by some special miracle that it can be grown into a tree'.¹ That the seed has been affected by a disease, and is being eaten by a deadly canker, does not occur to him. What he sees is imperfection; and to him imperfection is not a result of a fall but a condition of progress to a state of perfection or completeness. Tagore would rather use the word incompleteness than imperfection. 'Man has a feeling that he is truly represented in something which exceeds himself. He is aware that he is not imperfect, but incomplete.'²

Of the Christian conception of sin as disobedience Tagore has no understanding. 'Indeed man's legend has it that he bears the black mark of disobedience stamped on his forehead for ever, but still all this is *māyā*, envelopment of *avidyā*; it is the mist, it is not the sun; it is the black smoke that presages the fire of love.'³

To be sure, it may be serious enough. 'Man's mistakes and failures have by no means been trifling or small, they have strewn his path with colossal ruins; his sufferings have been immense, like birth-pangs for a giant child; they are the prelude of a fulfilment whose scope is infinite.'⁴ Yet they are only 'the smoke that presages the fire of love', they are the 'birth-pangs' of a greater humanity. Evil and sin are moments in the process of evolution. 'The question why there is evil in existence is the same as why there is imperfection or, in other words, why there is creation at all. We must take it for granted that it could not be otherwise; that creation must be imperfect, must be gradual, and that it is futile to ask the question, Why are we?'⁵ With these words Tagore, in *Sādhana*, introduces the problem of evil.

To be sure, Tagore seems here to be thinking more in terms of physical evil, pain and suffering, than of moral evil. Yet the latter also is included in his view. Evil is 'imperfection', and as such it has its meaning. It is like the boundaries of a river; its banks

¹ *Ib.*, 74.

² *The Religion of Man*, 59.

³ *Sādhana*, 80.

⁴ *Ib.*, 34; cf. *Personality*, 93.

⁵ *Sādhana*, 47.

seemingly are obstructions to its water, but 'do not these obstructions themselves give its water an onward motion?'¹ And this onward motion is towards perfection.

The facts that cause despondency and gloom are, after all, mere mist. At the centre of creation there is only beauty. We realise it when it breaks through in momentary gleams.² 'We realise that Creation is the perpetual harmony between the infinite ideal of perfection and the eternal continuity of its realisations; that so long as there is no absolute separation between the positive ideal and the material obstacle to its attainment, we need not be afraid of suffering and loss. This is the poet's religion.'³

So evil is 'the material obstacle' to the infinite ideal of perfection working out itself through the process of a continual creation. Seen as a whole the process exhibits perfect harmony. It is vain to complain over evil. This thought is expressed in a poem in *Gitanjali*:

When the creation was new
and all the stars shone in their first splendour,
the gods held their assembly in the sky and sang
'Oh, the picture of perfection! the joy unalloyed!'

But one cried of a sudden—

'It seems that somewhere there is a break in the chain of light
and one of the stars has been lost.'

The golden string of their harp snapped,
their songs stopped, and they cried in dismay—

'Yes, that lost star was the best,
she was the glory of all heavens!'

From that day the search is unceasing for her,
and the cry goes on from one to the other
that in her the world has lost its one joy!

Only in the deepest silence of night
the stars smile and whisper among themselves—

'Vain is this seeking! Unbroken perfection is over all!'⁴

It is difficult to understand how it is possible, in view of all the sin and depravity and utter wickedness in the world, to maintain this view that 'unbroken perfection is over all'. To be sure, 'the poet's

¹ *Sādhana*, 47.

^{2,3} *Creative Unity*, 15.

⁴ *Gitanjali*, no. 78.

religion' acknowledges 'the fact of evil; it openly admits "the weariness, the fever and the fret" in the world "where men sit and hear each other groan"; yet it remembers that in spite of all there is the song of the nightingale, and "haply the Queen Moon is on her throne".'¹

It is obvious that Tagore, although he sometimes seeks the ultimate explanation of evil in man's freedom, does not take that view seriously. He does not count with a will that has chosen its own way in rebellion against God and thus turned evil. In his opinion evil is, after all, only moments in a natural process of the universe towards perfection.

It is obvious, too, that Tagore's thought on sin and evil, though, to some extent, influenced by the Christian teaching, moves on a quite different line.

In the Christian teaching sin is no mere imperfection or an incomplete movement. It is a movement in the wrong direction, an altogether wrong course, the only one possible corrective of which is conversion, turning in the opposite direction. Said Jesus: 'I tell you truly, unless you turn and become like children, you will never get into the Realm of Heaven at all.'² And the Apostles entreated both Jews and Gentiles: 'Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.'³

Sin is not caused by mere ignorance. According to the unanimous testimony of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments its root is in the depravity of will, in a wrong decision, in disobedience, in revolt against God's holy will. Therefore repentance, *metanoia*, change of heart, is indispensable. Jesus said: 'Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'⁴

Offence against the Holy God brings a curse, the only way out of which is the forgiveness of sins.⁵ Sin does not pertain to man's nature as such, but it is a disease damaging his nature, spreading in his spiritual organism and bringing destruction and death to the whole of his being. 'The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and festering sores', the

¹ *Creative Unity*, 16 f.

² Matt. 18: 3 (Moffatt translation).

³ Acts 3: 19; cf. Acts 14: 15; 26: 18, 20; 1 Thess. 1: 9; etc.

^{4,5} Matt. 4: 17; cf. Mark 1: 15; Luke 5: 32; 13: 3; 24: 47; Acts 2: 38; 3: 19; 8: 22; 11: 18; Rom. 2: 4; 2 Cor. 7: 10; etc.

prophet complains.¹ Christ looked upon Himself as the physician sent to the sick.²

Evil is no mere mist clouding the vision of the ideal. It is a formidable reality with a power of ensnaring the soul, making it a captive of sin and death. Behind the sin and evil of the human world there is the power of the evil one, and the kingdom of evil. Tagore speaks with condescension of man's thought that 'there was an evil personality in the world which tempted him, and with all its cunning wiles waylaid him into destruction'.³ To Tagore all this is but 'the intensely painful antagonism of the child-life with the mother's life at the time of birth'.⁴

Such a view fails entirely to see the real nature of sin and evil. It is only too obvious that sin and evil are not the birth-pangs of a new life; they are formidable attempts to hinder and to destroy life, and their fruit is death. This is the teaching of the Bible from its first to its last page.⁵

The Bible clearly reveals a strong dualism in existence. It is not identical with the metaphysical dualism between the finite and the infinite of which Tagore speaks.⁶ It is the ethico-religious dualism between good and evil, between the divine love and all that is opposed to it, between God and 'the adversary'. There is something irrational about this dualism, because it has its origin in the fact of freedom, which is at the centre of personal life. Yet the dualism is there. God has an 'adversary'. Jesus speaks of 'the enemy' who is trying to spoil God's work and frustrate His plans.⁷ There is a battle going on between two strong powers. They are not equals. The enemy is formidable, he is 'the strong one, fully armed', guarding his court. But there is 'a stronger', who 'shall come upon him, and overcome him'.⁸

The dualism of which the Bible speaks is not absolute. The adversary has no eternal power like God. God is the sovereign. But the self-imposed limits of God's omnipotence, which are demanded by the very nature of love, rule out any kind of force and coercion in God's battle against His enemy.

The existence of the kingdom of evil accounts for the extremely serious attitude Jesus took as regards temptation. The one who has not felt the thrill of awe in the words of Jesus concerning temptation

¹ Isa. 1: 5, 6.

² Mark 2: 17.

^{3,4} *Personality*, 93.

⁵ Gen. 2: 17; Rom. 6: 23; Rev. 21: 8.

⁶ See above, p. 105.

⁷ Matt. 13: 28.

⁸ Luke 11: 21 f.

and in His fight against the evil forces has not understood the Gospels. 'If thy foot cause thee to stumble, cut it off: it is good for thee to enter into life halt, rather than having thy two feet to be cast into hell.'¹ His harsh word to Peter: 'Get thee behind me, Satan',² reveals the same fearful thrill, not to speak of His agony in Gethsemane. The terror that befell Him in the Garden was not merely a fear of the physical torments and death which He saw before Him. To be sure, it was also that; for, most probably, His bodily system was utterly sensitive to pain and suffering. But even this fear He felt as a terrible temptation to flinch from the course He saw pointed out for Him by the finger of the Father. In this temptation He felt the approach of the kingdom of evil trying to wrench His heart from the will of the Father. It is this fight against a formidable temptation that makes the agony in Gethsemane so dreadful. This is revealed in His admonition to the disciples: 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'³

These and similar words can be fully understood only if we take into account seriously the existence of the kingdom of evil, to the attacks of which He was extremely sensitive.

This is characteristic of the entire New Testament. St. Paul exhorts the Christians to 'be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might', and to 'take up the whole armour of God', that they 'may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.'⁴

The real significance of sin and evil is revealed only at the Cross. 'The Holy and Righteous One denied', 'the Prince of Life killed'⁵—such is the depravity of man. The only begotten Son of God sacrificed for the putting down of evil and for the salvation of man—such is the tremendous power of evil, such is the real situation of man. To everyone who has looked into the depth of sin and evil—'the deep things of Satan'⁶—it is poor consolation that 'there is the son of the nightingale, and "haply the Queen Moon is on her throne"'. In this situation it comes near to trifling nonsense to speak of the 'self-realisation' of man. Surely, one who is crushed

¹ Mark 9: 45.

² Mark 8: 33.

³ Mark 14: 38.

⁴ Eph. 6: 10 ff.

⁵ Acts 3: 14.

⁶ Rev. 2: 24.

by the burden of the curse of his sin, and terrified by the overwhelmingly tremendous power of evil, can see no hope except in the wonder of salvation wrought by God Himself. When, after all, it comes to light that a deadly cancer is eating the organism, nothing short of a 'special miracle' of divine grace will do. Here Luther's pregnant words are valid: 'To give grace, peace, eternal life, to forgive sins, to make righteous, make alive, deliver from death and the devil—that is not in the power of any creature to do; that is a work of the divine Majesty alone.'¹ Here we touch upon the question of salvation.

The analysis of Tagore's conception of sin and evil has shown that he failed to see the real nature of sin, the depth of human depravity and the terrible fact of the curse and guilt of sin and evil. Therefore he had no need of divine interference for the salvation of mankind. He conceived of salvation as the 'self-realisation of man' in terms of evolution. This conception has been shown to be equally untrue to the facts of human experience and to the divine revelation of the Cross.

¹ *Commentary on the Galatians*, ch. 2.

VIII

TAGORE'S CONCEPTION OF SALVATION

From our account of Tagore's conceptions of man, sin and evil it is obvious that, in connection with Tagore's religion, we can speak of 'salvation' only in a relative, almost figurative, sense of the word; it has to be put within inverted commas. For if man's nature is part and parcel of God's nature, if man's finite self is a part of the infinite Self, if sin and evil, serious though they may be, are, after all, but imperfections or incompleteness necessary for the course of evolution—then 'salvation' can only mean the removal of obstacles to the realisation of his own self, his overcoming of hindrances in man's constant process of becoming what he principally and fundamentally already is.

As the obstacles, as we pointed out in the previous chapter, are caused by *avidyā*, ignorance, 'salvation', in its negative aspect, can only mean the removal of ignorance. Accepting 'the typical thought of India', Tagore maintains that 'true deliverance of man is the deliverance from *avidyā*, from ignorance'.¹

In an account of Tagore's religion the idea of salvation must be replaced by that of *self-realisation*.² 'The more man acts and makes actual what was latent in him, the nearer does he bring the distant yet-to-be.'³ He is in the state of becoming, in a process of constant self-realisation. 'Man is not complete; he is yet to be. In what he *is* he is small, and if we could conceive him stopping there for eternity we should have an idea of the most awful hell that man can imagine. In his *to be* he is infinite; there is his heaven, his deliverance. . . . To be what? To be one with *Brahma*. For the region of the infinite is the region of unity.'⁴ If we understand the real desire of our soul and the true nature of our being there is no reason for being satisfied with anything less. 'Yes, we must become *Brahma*. We must not shrink from avowing this.'⁵ For, at the bottom of our being, we are already one with him, just as the river, in regard to its nature, is one with the sea. Of course, there is a difference between

¹ *Sādhana*, 72.

² *The Religion of Man*, 55; *Sādhana*, 95, 111, 120, 138.

³ *Sādhana*, 120.

⁴ *Ib.*, 153 f.

⁵ *Ib.*, 155.

Brahma and our individual soul. 'Call it illusion or ignorance, or whatever name you may give it, it is there. . . . *Brahma* is *Brahma*, he is the infinite ideal of perfection. But we are not what we truly are; we are ever to become true, ever to become *Brahma*.¹ The river is not the sea, yet it is one with it, and it is constantly on the way to become perfectly one with it. 'In the music of the rushing stream sounds the joyful assurance, "I shall become the sea". It is not a vain assumption, it is true humility, for it is the truth.'² Overcoming all obstacles, serving numerous fields, forests, villages and towns in various ways by cleansing them and watering them and by carrying their produce from one place to another, it has its only true aim in the ocean. In the same manner, our soul can only become *Brahma*, as the river can become the sea.'³

It is quite clear that along this line of thought of human self-realisation there is no need of a saviour and no place for the Atonement. The eyes have not been open to the revelation of the Cross. In the light of the Cross the situation of man appears to be quite different from the one pictured by Tagore. The fact of the Cross reveals the terrible power of sin and evil. If the only One righteous was hated, persecuted and killed, not by criminals, but by quite ordinary men—how deep is the wickedness of the human heart! And this wickedness is universal. 'All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.'⁴ The human race is not a mere agglomeration of individuals (as Hindu philosophy generally conceives of it), a 'herd' or an 'ocean' of souls; it is an organism, in which each part, each individual, is closely connected with the others. If one part or member of the body suffers it will affect the whole organism. Sin twines and twists itself in a thousand ways through the whole body of the human race, affecting fatally every member and the whole of it. 'Sin came into the world by one man, and death came in by sin, and so death spread to all men in as much as all men sinned', says St. Paul.⁵ Sin enslaves.⁶ 'Verily, verily I say unto you, Every one that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin', Jesus said.⁷ St. Paul complains that he is 'carnal, sold under sin', that he is brought 'into captivity under the law of sin'.⁸ Consequently there can be no talk of self-realisation, for self-realisation, under such conditions, would mean sinking deeper down into sin and evil. Only in a new creative act of God's grace is there any hope. 'O

¹ *Ib.*, 155.^{2,3} *Ib.*, 156.^{4,5} Rom. 3: 23; cf. 5: 12.⁶ Heb. 12: 1.⁷ John 8: 34.⁸ Rom. 7: 14, 23.

wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'¹ 'There is a new creation whenever a man comes to be in Christ; what is old is gone, the new has come.'²

The Cross reveals the immense sway of the evil power. 'To this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.'³ According to the Bible God sent His Son only when other attempts had failed. 'At last He sent His Son.'⁴ According to the testimony given by Jesus Himself as to the meaning of His work He had come 'to give His life a ransom for many'.⁵ In these words, with all probability, there is a reminiscence of the prophecy by Isaiah: 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.'⁶ At the institution of the Lord's Supper Christ gave the assurance to His disciples that His blood was to be shed for many.⁷ In the words of St. John Jesus declared to Nicodemus: 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life.'⁸

If this last step was necessary—how strong is the power of evil!

The unanimous testimony of the New Testament and of the whole Christian Church throughout the ages connects the salvation of man with the self-sacrifice of Christ. There is something unfathomably mysterious about the fact of the Cross. It seems not possible to give a logically adequate expression to its significance. The New Testament and the teachers of the Church have employed many different metaphors in illustration of different aspects of its meaning. These metaphors have not always been allowed to remain metaphors, but have been treated as adequate terms, upon the foundation of which have been erected huge buildings of theological theories, which often have more obscured than elucidated the real significance of the Cross. The metaphors must be allowed to remain metaphors. Then only will they render us the useful service of shedding light on various aspects of the unfathomable significance of the unique fact of the Cross.

We will mention a few of the more important of these metaphors. The Cross is the 'reconciliation' of God and man. Two enemies

¹ Rom. 7: 24, 25.

² 2 Cor. 5: 17 (Moffatt translation).

³ 1 John 3: 8.

⁴ Mark 12: 6.

⁵ Mark 10: 45.

⁶ Isa. 53: 5.

⁷ Mark 14: 24.

⁸ John 3: 16.

become friends again. But, in this case, it is the sole merit of one of them. In Christ God came to man in order to take away the enmity of the human heart. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.'¹ 'While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.'² A Christian teacher who has studied most carefully all the religions of the world and who has thought and felt most deeply for humanity says of the Cross: 'God yearned after humanity in order to lift it to His fatherly bosom; His hand was grievously wounded, but He succeeded.'³

Christ's death is spoken of as a 'sacrifice'. He is 'the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world',⁴ the 'Passover sacrificed' for us.⁵ Man stands before God as a sinner, heavy laden by the terrible weight of the curse of his sin, unable to rid himself of it. All religions know of sacrifices in some form or other, repeated from time to time, offered to God as propitiation for sin. But here is the perfect Sacrifice, made 'once for all, when He offered up Himself'.⁶ In all religions sacrifices are made by men to God. But here God Himself makes the Sacrifice, thereby removing the curse of men's sin. The only sacrifice He wants from men is a contrite heart⁷ and a consecrated life: 'He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again.'⁸ The curse of men's sin is too formidable a reality to be removed by men's own effort; only God can do it.

Christ's life was given as a 'ransom' paid for the life of sinners.⁹ The salvation of man could not be bought for a cheaper price.¹⁰ To ask to whom the ransom was paid is to put an irrelevant question, for the metaphor is employed only to illustrate the cost of our salvation: His life was given for ours.

Christ's death was a 'penalty' for our transgressions. He 'was delivered up for our trespasses'.¹¹ 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.'¹² Here is a glimpse of vicarious suffering. Undoubtedly such suffering is a reality in this world of ours. A loving mother and father will often have to suffer for the sins of their

¹ 2 Cor. 5: 19.

² Rom. 5: 10.

³ Nathan Söderblom: *The Historic Christian Fellowship* (Jerusalem Meeting Report, Vol. III), 149.

⁴ John 1: 29.

⁵ 1 Cor. 5: 7.

⁶ Heb. 7: 27.

⁷ Ps. 51: 16, 17.

⁸ 2 Cor. 5: 15.

⁹ Mark 10: 45; 1 Tim. 2: 6.

¹⁰ 1 Pet. 1: 18, 19.

¹¹ Rom. 4: 25.

¹² Isa. 53: 5.

child; children may have to suffer for the sins of their parents; a brother will have to suffer for his brother, a friend for his friend. Some will have to suffer for their family, for their nation and country. The more real their love is, the more deeply will they feel the sin and guilt of their beloved ones as their own. One only has had to suffer for the whole human race; One only has been able to suffer for the sin of the whole world; One only has had a love deep enough for that purpose; only divine love is capable of it. 'Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us.'¹ A medieval Christian poet sang:

Thy grief and Thy compassion
Were all for sinners' gain.
Mine, mine was the transgression,
But Thine the deadly pain.

Probably the most expressive and exhaustive metaphor in respect of the Cross is that of a 'victorious battle'. In the death on the Cross Christ on our behalf fought our enemy and won the victory over sin, death and the devil and the whole kingdom of evil. Here was an invincible obedience, against which all the temptations of sin were futile, a rock on which the power of the assailing forces was broken. He was 'obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross'.² Here was an undefeated love, which no ingratitude, hatred or enmity could destroy, a love that 'beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things', a love that 'never faileth'.³ Thus Christ in His death fought our foe, defeated evil and opened the way between God and man, making man free from slavery under sin, evil and death. The situation of humanity has been fundamentally changed through Christ's victory. 'Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.'⁴ The Father 'delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love'.⁵

The Cross on Calvary is the decisive fact, the turning-point in the history of the world. It has universal significance. It has changed the fate of the world or, to use the Indian term, the '*karma*' of the

¹ 1 John 3: 16.

² Phil. 2: 8.

³ 1 Cor. 13: 7, 8.

⁴ Heb. 2: 14 ff.

⁵ Col. 1: 13.

world. As humanity is an organism and not a herd of mere individuals the '*karma*' is not only an individual one but also a 'joint *karma*', spreading its curse from one member to every member and 'cell' of the organism. But for the same reason the effect, the blessing, of the Cross is not only an individual one but a joint blessing, spreading from the one healthy member of the organism to every member who does not cut himself off from the life-giving stream. 'For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One shall the many be made righteous.'¹ Christ is the beginning of a new creation. In Him God is re-creating humanity, restoring man to his original status of being a true image of God, making him a new man by giving him His Son's spirit and thereby making him an heir of the divine eternal life.²

To believe in Christ's victory for us is salvation. Through the Holy Spirit Christ's victory is made a reality in our own lives. We feel that however much a man may have improved himself morally and spiritually, if he has not responded to this divine initiative, if Christ's victory has not become a reality in his life, he is still below the region of salvation. Any effort of spiritual refinement is beside the mark. St. Paul writes: 'I could rely on outward privilege, if I chose. Whoever thinks he can rely on that, I can outdo him. . . . But for Christ's sake I have learned to count my former gains a loss; indeed I count anything a loss, compared to the supreme value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.'³

In incomparable words Martin Luther has summed up the significance of the Cross: 'I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity and also true man born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, secured and delivered me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with silver and gold, but with His holy and precious blood, with His innocent suffering and death; in order that I might be His, live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.'⁴

In the last lines of this statement is given a brief, yet a wonderfully accurate, summary of the Christian belief in regard to the result of the salvation through Christ. The result is the establishment of

¹ Rom. 5: 19.

² Rom. 5: 18; 8: 29; 2 Cor. 5: 17.

³ Phil. 3: 4, 7. (Moffatt's translation). ⁴ *Small Catechism*, 2nd Article.

the kingdom of God. To be saved means to become a member of that kingdom in whole-hearted and complete allegiance to Christ. For Christ is not a past fact only. As He is risen from the dead He lives and reigns to all eternity.

About the life to come the New Testament does not elaborate but gives only slight hints and suggestions. 'What we are to be is not apparent yet, but we do know that when He appears, we are to be like Him—for we are to see Him as He is.'¹ 'What no eye has ever seen, what no ear has ever heard, what never entered the mind of man, God has prepared all that for those who love Him.'²

In fine agreement with the New Testament Luther, in the above words, confines himself to saying only that as he has lived under Him and served Him here he shall continue to do so in righteousness, innocence and blessedness to all eternity, because such life and such service are everlasting.

The nature and the goal of the self-realisation of man are conceived in terms of harmony and union. In a beautifully plastic language of poetical metaphors Tagore describes the state of the soul 'when her veil is lifted and she is face to face with her eternal lover'. 'It is like a morning of spring, varied in its life and beauty, yet one and entire. When a man's life rescued from distractions finds its unity in the soul, then the consciousness of the infinite becomes at once direct and natural to it as the light is to the flame. All the conflicts and contradictions of life are reconciled; knowledge, love, and action are harmonised; pleasure and pain become one in beauty, enjoyment and renunciation equal in goodness; the breach between the finite and the infinite fills with love and overflows; every moment carries its message of the eternal; the formless appears to us in the form of the flower, of the fruit; the boundless takes us up in his arms as a father and walks by our side as a friend. It is only the soul, the ONE in man which by its very nature can overcome all limits, and finds its affinity with the Supreme One.'³

This conception of a continuous self-realisation has helped Tagore's optimism over the hard fact of death. The first visit of death came to him as a rude shock. He succeeded in getting over it by finding out the meaning of death. In the beginning he found the blessing of death in the fact that it balanced 'the terrible weight of an unopposed life-force'.⁴ Later he delved deeper into its meaning and was able

¹ 1 John 3: 2 (Moffatt's translation). ² 1 Cor. 2: 9 (Moffatt's translation.)

³ *Sādhanā*, 43.

⁴ See above, p. 91.

to see in it the portal of a new life. 'Our own self to live must go through a continual change of growth of form, which may be termed a continual death and a continual life at the same time.'¹ In the same manner physical death is but a birth to a new form of life. What that form is like we can have no idea of, just as the child in the mother's womb can have no idea of the life in the outer world to which it is to be born.² Although painful like every birth, death is nothing to be afraid of. In a genuinely Indian picture this aspect is brought out in a poem: 'The child cries out when from the right breast the mother takes it away, in the very next moment to find in the left one its consolation.'³

This metaphor could be used to suggest the idea of reincarnation. It is not quite clear whether Tagore held the belief of transmigration or not. To be sure, some expressions in his poems and other writings seem to indicate it. In a love-poem he says: 'I shall gladly suffer the pride of culture to die out in my house, if only in some happy future I am born a herd boy in the Brinda forest.'⁴ This, however, seems to mean no more than a poetical use of an old idea. More weight is carried by some poems in *Gitanjali* which Dr. Radhakrishnan⁵ has drawn attention to:

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure.
This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again
and fillest it ever with fresh life.⁶

With these words *Gitanjali* opens up its train of song-offerings. Whether they should be understood in the sense of reincarnation is doubtful. The subsequent verses of the same poem do not suggest that idea. A few pages further on, however, we come across this poem:

The time that my journey takes is long
and the way of it long.
I came out on the chariot of the first gleam of light,
and pursued my voyage through the wilderness of worlds
leaving my track on many a star and planet.⁷

With this may be compared a poem in *Lover's Gift*:

There is a looker-on who sits behind my eyes
it seems he has seen things in ages and worlds

¹ *Sādhanā*, 81.

² *The Religion of Man*, 199; *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 10.

³ *Gitanjali*, no. 95.

⁴ *Lover's Gift*, no. 22.

The Philosophy of Tagore, 63.

⁵ *Gitanjali*, no. 1.

⁷ *Gitanjali*, no. 12; cf. *Poems*, no. 6.

beyond memory's shore,
 and those forgotten sights glisten on the grass
 and shiver on the leaves.
 He has seen under new veils the face of the one beloved,
 in twilight hours of many a nameless star.
 Therefore this sky seems to ache
 with the pain of countless meetings and partings,
 and the longing pervades this spring breeze
 the longing that is full of the whisper of ages
 without beginning.¹

These poems surely hint at a long series of births in different forms of existence, but there is scarcely any indication of a re-incarnation, a re-birth to this earthly life. The thoughts seem to apply rather to a life in other regions of the universe. The assertion that we can have as small an idea of what life after death is like as the child in the mother's womb can know anything of life in the outer world points in the same direction.

In any case, there is nothing of the *karma*-doctrine and its combination with the *samsāra*-belief. If Tagore believed in the transmigration of souls it was not in a *samsāra* of punishment and reward for one's actions. His father was known to disbelieve these doctrines. 'This appeared to me to be unworthy vain imaginings. I could not respond to them. They were not the transcriptions of the promptings of my heart', he says in his *Autobiography*.² For Rabindranath's own attitude to the common Hindu doctrines of *karma* and *samsāra* his reply to a question, whether the common report was true that his father in his old age inclined to accept them, is conclusive: 'My father never believed in that fairy tale.'³

Along with these hints of the soul's endless voyage through different forms of life in other regions of the universe stand the expressions of the longing for the end of the voyage.

No more sailing from harbour to harbour
 with this my weather-beaten boat.
 The days are long past when my sport was to be tossed
 on waves.
 And now I am eager to die into the deathless.⁴

¹ *Lover's Gift*, no. 39; cf. *Poems*, no. 28.

² P. 162.

³ E. J. Thompson: *Rabindranath Tagore, His Life and Work*, 99.

⁴ *Gitanjali*, no. 100.

Gitanjali ends with a prayer full of longing for the eternal home:

Like a flock of homesick cranes
flying night and day back to their mountain nests
let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home
in one salutation to thee.¹

It will be noticed that this death 'into the deathless', the flow of the river into the sea, and other such expressions can easily be understood in the Vedāntic sense of the individual soul dissolving into the impersonal ocean of deity. Such an interpretation, however, seems to be excluded by the emphatic statement in *The Religion of Man*: 'But such an ideal of the utter extinction of the individual separateness has not a universal sanction in India. There are many of us whose prayer is for dualism, so that for them the bond of devotion with God may continue for ever.'² Yet such metaphors reveal a wavering between a definitely personal and an impersonal conception of God.

We have found two different lines of thought in regard to the future life, which are not easily reconciled with each other. Yet both seem to be integral parts of Tagore's thinking. On the one hand, an endless series of births and deaths seems to square well with his idea of the universe as an endless evolution, an eternal manifestation in finite forms of the infinite. Life is inexhaustible. 'I shall die again and again to know that life is inexhaustible.'³ It is an eternal love-game of hide and seek between God and the soul. 'The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky. With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant, and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me.'⁴

On the other hand, there is also, in his thinking, the idea of a purpose, an end, a goal of life and of the universe; to become one with God; the river has its goal in the sea.⁵ There will come an end of the love-game. The King of the Dark Chamber says at the end to the Queen: 'I open the doors of this dark room today—the game is finished here! Come, come with me now, come outside—into the light!'⁶

Both these lines of thought run alongside each other in the poetry of Tagore. Now the one, now the other comes to the forefront, as the

¹ *Ib.*, no. 103.

² P. 202.

³ *Stray Birds*, no. 282.

⁴ *Gitanjali*, no. 71.

⁵ *Sādhana*, 156.

⁶ *The King of the Dark Chamber*, 199.

mood of the poet at the moment may be.¹ He himself seems to be aware of the conflict, but he is not able to decide between them. The idea of this twofold possibility of the outcome of life has come to expression in a poem in *Gitanjali*:

I am like a remnant of a cloud of autumn
uselessly roaming in the sky,
O my sun ever-glorious!
Thy touch has not yet melted my vapour,
making me one with thy light,
and thus I count months and years separated from thee.

If this be thy wish and if this be thy play,
then take this fleeting emptiness of mine,
paint it with colours, gild it with gold,
float it on the wanton wind
and spread it in varied wonders.

And again when it shall be thy wish to end this play at night,
I shall melt and vanish away in the dark,
or it may be in a smile of the white morning,
in a coolness of purity transparent.²

In any case death has lost its sting. It has no longer anything terrifying in it; it is the 'servant', 'the messenger', of the Lord.³ It is 'the last fulfilment of life',⁴ the transition 'into the deathless'. The day of death, therefore, is a day of feast and joy:

O thou the last fulfilment of life,
Death, my death, come and whisper to me!

The flowers have been woven
and the garland is ready for the bridegroom.
After the wedding the bride shall leave her home,
and meet her lord alone in the solitude of night.⁵

These metaphors scarcely have anything in common with the Christian longing for the heavenly bridegroom and home, as Heiler seems to think.⁶ The whole atmosphere is quite different. There is nothing, in Tagore's poems, of love and thanksgiving to the Lord

¹ Cf. W. Graefe: *Die Weitanschauung Rabindranath Tagores*, 21.

² *Gitanjali*, no. 80.

³ *Ib.*, no. 86.

^{4,5} *Ib.*, no. 91.

⁶ Fr. Heiler: *Christlicher Glaube und Indisches Geistesleben*, 34 f.

who has shed His blood for him and saved him from sin and death, which is the centre of the Christian longing for the heavenly bridegroom.

The above poems were written when the day was still bright with the zenith sun. When the day was drawing to its close 'in the phantasmal light of the sick-bed', naturally also the fear of death visited the heart:

I know that you will have me
and the fear spreads from sky to sky,
the fear of the terrible indifference of the All.¹

¹ *Poems*, no. 115. This poem was written during the poet's last illness.

IX

TAGORE'S CONCEPTION OF GOD

In the previous chapters of this book we had reason again and again to make references to the God-idea of Tagore. We found a close connection between his conceptions of the universe, of life, of man, of ethics, etc., and his conception of God. In many cases the particular structure of an idea could be traced back to the structure of his God-idea. In this chapter we will attempt an analysis of his conception of God.

Before entering upon this task, however, it will be helpful to consider Tagore's conception of revelation. The 'religion of man' had been revealed to him in a 'vision'. On this he insists. On the other hand, he maintains that it had been growing within him. It had followed the current of his temperament from his early days. These statements seem to contradict each other. But this is only seemingly so. The conflict is dissolved as soon as we realise what Tagore understands by 'revelation'.

How do we know anything about God? On this question volumes of theology and philosophy have been written. Generally speaking the answers given have been moving on two different lines. On the one hand it has been maintained that human reason or intuition, or both combined, are able to discover God and know Him. On the other hand, this has often been emphatically denied. God is too high and too great to be found and known by human reason and understanding. We can know Him only if He chooses to disclose Himself to us, to remove the veil that hides Him. Such self-disclosure or revelation is conceived of either in terms of communications of propositions, 'truths' about God, laid down in sacred books, or in terms of actions, mighty divine deeds, in which God approaches man and enters into communion with him.

Tagore's thought decidedly moved on the first of these lines. His way towards knowledge of God is that of discovery. In our chapter on Tagore's view of the world we described how Tagore found God everywhere. Tagore looks at the universe; there he finds God. 'In this playhouse of infinite forms I have had my play, and

here I have caught sight of Him that is formless.¹ The rustling leaves would read the king's message to the poet.² It was painted in petals and flowers.³ He understood the voice of the stars and the silence of the trees.⁴ The poignant song is echoed through all the sky.⁵ The light of God's music illumines the world.⁶ The poet felt in the air a faint smell of His presence.⁷

Have you not heard his silent steps?
He comes, comes, ever comes.

In the fragrant days of sunny April
through the forest path
he comes, comes, ever comes.

In the rainy gloom of July nights
on the thundering chariot of clouds
he comes, comes, ever comes.⁸

Because God is the omnipresent life He is, first and foremost, immanent in human personality. 'Thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart. And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it is thy power (that) gives me strength to act.'⁹

There is no evidence, however, that Tagore, like the mystics, tried to meet God in his own heart through meditation and contemplation. He seems not to have been a man of the contemplative type.¹⁰ Compared to the overwhelmingly rich expressions of joy over God's presence in nature, evidences for communion with Him in the heart are surprisingly poor in his poetry.

Thou ocean of things, they say in thy dark depths there are
pearls and gems without end.

Many a diver learned in the sea is seeking for them.

But I care not to join in their search.

The light that flashes on your surface, the mystery that
heaves on your bosom, the music that maddens your waves
and the dance that trips on your foam, are enough
for me.¹¹

¹ *Gitanjali*, no. 96.

² *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 4.

³ *Ib.*, no. 5.

⁴ *Ib.*, no. 15.

⁵ *Gitanjali*, no. 71.

⁶ *Ib.*, no. 3.

⁷ *Ib.*, no. 46.

⁸ *Ib.*, no. 45.

⁹ *Ib.*, no. 4.

¹⁰ This opinion, which I have formed during my reading of his poems, has been confirmed for me by Professor Kshiti Mohan Sen.

¹¹ *Poems* no. 14.

On the other hand, Tagore found God in the events and changes, in the joys and sorrows, of his life. 'In sorrow after sorrow it is his steps that press upon my heart, and it is the golden touch of his feet that makes my joy to shine.'¹ When death knocked at his door he felt it was the messenger of God that visited his home.² His reverses and defeats were to him a call from the Eternal Lover to a love-tryst.

My Master has bid me while I stand at the road-side
to sing the song of Defeat,
For that is the bride whom He woos in secret. . . .
But the stars are singing the love-song of the eternal
to a face sweet with shame and suffering.
The door has been opened in the lonely chamber,
the call has sounded,
and the heart of the darkness throbs with awe
because of the coming tryst.³

Because Tagore found God everywhere he had no need of any revelation. He read the Upanishads and other sacred books. They were to him 'things of the spirit', and he used them 'as being instinct with individual meaning',⁴ but he did not regard them as revelation in the proper sense of the word.

Still less did he look to history for a special revelation of God. To be sure, he believed in 'prophets', through whom the truth of life had been shining with special clarity and power. But it was the omnipresent light which had been there all the time, only breaking through to greater brightness in the soul of the prophet. In this respect his description of Zarathustra, to whom we will turn in a moment, is revealing.

Only with reservation can we speak of Tagore's conception of 'revelation'. We had better put it within inverted commas. He could conceive of revelation only as a moment, or moments, of the evolution of man. His strong belief in evolution was not limited to the material world, but comprised the spiritual aspect of the universe as well. Actually it was only there that the meaning of the whole process became visible. The changes in religion, therefore, were most significant phases of the evolution of man. 'In the history of religion our realization of its nature has gone through many changes even like our realization of the nature of the material world.'⁵

¹ *Gitanjali*, no. 45.

See above, p. 15 f.

² *Ib.*, no. 86.

³ *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 85.

⁵ *The Religion of Man*, 75.

The changes of religious evolution appear and take shape in the messages of great prophets. But what happens in the appearance of a prophet is that the stream of religious life, which runs through the race in a hidden current under the surface, comes to light in a sudden outburst.

In this respect Tagore's account of Zarathustra is instructive. There was a time when, along with other Aryan peoples, the Persians also worshipped the elemental gods of nature, whose favour was not to be won by any moral duty performed or service of love. That in fact was the crude beginning of the scientific spirit trying to unlock the hidden sources of power in nature. 'But through it all there must have been some current of deeper desire which constantly contradicted the crust of power and indicated worlds of inner good, infinitely more precious than natural gain. Its voice was not strong at first nor was it heeded by the majority of the people; but its influences, like the life within the seed, were silently working. Then comes the great prophet; and in his life and mind the hidden fire of truth suddenly bursts out into flame.'¹

Tagore's conception can be said to be that of an immanent revelation. The content of revelation as well as the revealing forces are both at hand in man—'like the life within the seed'—before it comes to light in a 'revelation'. The significance of revelation is only this, that 'the hidden fire suddenly bursts out into flame'. There is nothing really new in it.

The biblical conception of the divine revelation is very different. To be sure, according to the Bible also God is revealed in nature. 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork', says the psalmist.² And St. Paul asserts: 'For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity.'³

Still more, God is revealed in the events of human life, in that of individuals as well as in that of nations. In the crushing experiences of their nation the prophets were able to see God's finger.

But two things are to be taken into account in regard to this general revelation. First, man and the whole life of the human race have been depraved by sin and evil. Life is not what God meant it to be; it does not mirror the glory of God; we see there also the traces of the evil one. Hence it gives a distorted and confusing knowledge of

¹ *Ib.*, p. 61.

² Ps. 19: 1.

³ Rom. 1: 20.

God. We see Him darkly as in a spoiled mirror. Secondly, the spiritual eye, the organ in man by means of which he should be able to 'see God', has also been corrupted by sin. Everything in creation that testifies to the glory of God is therefore perverted by man's sinful heart. The glory of the incorruptible God is changed into an image of corruptible man. The eye as well as the mirror must be created anew. Revelation must take the form of redemption.

Because Tagore does not take sin and evil seriously, he has no need of the special revelation, a redemptive act of God. The Christian faith, on the other hand, looks to history, to the redemptive work of God at a specific point in the history of mankind, for the true and perfect revelation of God. Hinduism takes no interest in history; it is concerned only with timeless 'eternal truths'. The Christian faith lays the strongest emphasis on history, especially on the historical event that took place 'under Pontius Pilate'.

To be sure, in Christian theology revelation has often been conceived of as supernatural communication of divine 'truth'. The medieval Schoolmen, under the influence of Greek, especially Aristotelian, philosophy, elaborated a doctrine of revelation, according to which revelation added to the natural knowledge of God certain supernatural truths which human reason, by its own power, could not obtain. The knowledge of God, consequently, consisted of two kinds of truths: natural and revealed. Protestant Orthodoxy in the main followed the same line of thought and regarded the Bible as a divinely mediated body of supernatural truth.

This was a very intellectualistic conception of revelation. The dangers implied in it became apparent in the eighteenth century through English Deism and the philosophy and theology of the German Enlightenment. These rationalists tended to ascribe more and more to human reason and less and less to revelation, until the latter was made altogether superfluous.

Closer studies of the Christian faith, in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, however, have made it clear that the Bible itself does not look upon revelation in this intellectualistic way. Revelation, primarily, is not communication of truths, but God communicating Himself to men in redemptive deeds. I say 'primarily', for in any act of revelation an element of knowledge is involved. Yet knowledge is not the main element; the chief element of revelation

¹ Rom. 1 : 21-23.

is the redemptive activity of God. For that which separates God and man is not merely or essentially ignorance, but the formidable positive obstacles of sin and evil. God's way towards men, therefore, is a way of labour and battle. He has to overcome the power of evil and remove the curse of sin in order to establish fellowship with man. This redemptive activity in history and in individuals constitutes God's revelation.

Such redemptive deeds in history the Christian faith recognises in the election and fostering of a certain nation, Israel, as a special preparation, and, above all, in the sending of God's Son Jesus Christ into the world, and in His suffering, death and resurrection, the first-hand and fundamental testimony to and interpretation of which are given in the Bible. This redemptive revelation is continued, through the Holy Spirit, in the Church and in individuals. The testimony of the Bible and the experiences of the Church and the individual Christian constantly corroborate and verify one another.

Between this conception of revelation and that of Tagore, obviously, there is a yawning chasm, which cannot be easily bridged. The difference has its root in a different conception of God.

Tagore's conception of God underwent several changes during the course of his spiritual development. In the earliest of his basic religious experiences the God-consciousness was rather weak or almost absent. In the third there is the dawn of a consciousness of the presence of God, a dim sense of 'a Being, seeking his best expression in my experiences'.¹ In the beginning of his poetical and religious development Tagore seems to have had his consciousness directed exclusively towards the life of the universe. It was the unity of the life-process itself as a continuous movement that attracted his imagination. But it was not long before he detected a personal being creative in the life-process. This being, the activity of which he discovered in his experiences, seems to have been, in a way, a projection into the universe of his own creative genius. At least he identified it with the idea of his *jīvan devatā*, 'the Lord of his life'.²

'To this Being I was responsible,' he says, 'for the creation in me is his as well as mine. It may be that it was the same creative Mind that is shaping the universe to its eternal idea; but in me as a person it had one of its special centres of a personal relationship growing into a deepening consciousness.'³ This interpretation, given more

¹ See above, p. 45.

² *The Religion of Man*, 97.

³ *Ib.*, 96.

than thirty years after the event, is no doubt coloured by later experiences and thoughts. Yet there is in it a memory of the dawn of the idea that the creative genius he had a feeling of in his own experiences 'may be . . . was the same creative Mind that is shaping the universe'.

It is not clear how exactly Tagore conceived of this being. According to D. S. Sarma,¹ it is 'not exactly God, but rather his own higher self—not the universal consciousness, but a special centre of that consciousness'. E. J. Thompson² finds in the *jīvan devatā* idea a blend of several threads: 'In it are Indian teaching as to reincarnation and previous births; the revelation of modern science concerning the way in which the strands of all beings reach back to dim, hidden beginnings; the findings of psychology, and, binding all and giving to their union a personal quality of his own, there is the poet's own imagination and inspired guessing.'

It seems clear that this being is not God, for it has not the universality of the infinite. Yet it is more than the poet himself, in any case, more than his empirical being. It was the inspirer of his songs and poems. Tagore as a poet was conscious of speaking with a voice that was not exactly his own. 'The creation in me is his as well as mine', he says.³ 'It gave me a great joy to feel in my life detachment at the idea of a mystery of a meeting of the two in a creative comradeship.'⁴ 'Any poet', says Masti Venkatesa Iyengar, 'who looks at his own work, whatever its worth, with some detachment, is likely to get the feeling that some power not himself is working through him. This feeling seems to have become unusually real and continuous to Rabindranath at this period of his life when he was in the middle of his poetic career.'⁵ To his *jīvan devatā* he addressed a number of poems, to one of which he makes reference in *The Religion of Man*:

Thou who art the innermost Spirit of my being,
art thou pleased,
Lord of my life?
For I gave to thee my cup
filled with all the pain and delight
that the crushed grapes of my heart had surrendered,

¹ *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, 361.

² *Rabindranath Tagore, His Life and Work*, 74 f.

^{3,4} *The Religion of Man*, 96.

⁵ Masti Venkatesa Iyengar: *Rabindranath Tagore*, 48.

I wove with the rhythm of colours and songs the cover
for thy bed,
and with the molten gold of my desires
I fashioned play-things for thy passing hours.¹

But he could also speak less reverently to his *Jivan devatā*. According to E. J. Thompson² a poem of his 'bride' playing 'a game of death' with him in a wild and stormy night, must be understood, not as a love-poem, but as an attempt to come to 'an understanding with this strange, beautiful, terrible mistress of his life'.

We are to play the game of death tonight,
my bride and I.
The night is black, the clouds in the sky are capricious,
and the waves are raving at sea.
We have left our bed of dreams,
flung open the door and come out,
my bride and I.
We sit upon a swing, and the stormwinds give us a wild push
from behind . . .
Tonight has come to us the call of the storm from the wild . . .
We are face to face and heart to heart,
my bride and I.³

The idea of his *Jivan devatā* was by no means mere poetic fancy. His mention of it in *The Religion of Man*⁴ quoted above makes it clear that he meant it seriously.

His *Jivan devatā* faith, however, was a phase only. It was 'growing into a deepening consciousness'. 'The belief dawned upon him that 'it may be that it was the same creative mind that is shaping the universe'. The conviction was growing in him that 'the steps that I heard in my playroom are the same that are echoing from star to star'.⁵

He went on to a mystical apprehension of a personal God. He became convinced, to use his own words, 'that the infinite became defined in humanity and came close to me so as to need my love and co-operation'.⁶ God became the central object of his thoughts and the ultimate meaning of his songs.

¹ *The Religion of Man*, 97; cf. *Poems*, no. 11.

² *Rabindranath Tagore, His Life and Work*, 75.

³ *The Gardener*, no. 82.

⁴ P. 96.

⁵ *Gitanjali*, no. 43.

⁶ *The Religion of Man*, 96.

'From the words of the poet men take what meanings please them; yet their last meaning points to thee.'¹

According to Professor Mukerji this new phase in his religious development came to light in his book *Naibedya* (1901), 'the keynote of which was prayerful quest'.²

Many strands of influences helped in forming the content of this new concept in Tagore's religion. First, there is the Upanishadic doctrine of the all-pervading *Brahma*, but, in accordance with the Vaishnavite tradition of thought, conceived as a personal being, the Supreme Person.

Influenced by Rudolf Eucken³ Tagore lays emphasis upon the fact that reality must be conceived of as personality. Nothing is real except in relation to a personal centre. 'When that centre is taken away, then it falls to pieces, becomes a heap of abstractions, matter and force, logical symbols.'⁴ There are innumerable centres, each one of which has its own little world related to its own personality.⁵ This concession Tagore would give to William James' hypothesis of a pluralistic universe.⁶ But he emphatically rejects the idea that 'the reality is many, irreconcilably different from each other'.⁷ 'If we have to give an answer in the affirmative, our whole nature rebels.'⁸ Reality is one, for there is one infinite centre to which all personalities, and therefore, all the world of reality, are related. He is *Mahāntam purusham*, the One Supreme Person; he is *Satyam*, the one Supreme Reality; he is *Gnānam*, he has the knowledge in Him of all knowers, therefore he knows Himself in all knowings; He is *Sarvānubhuh*, He feels in Him the feelings of all creatures, therefore He feels Himself in all feelings.⁹ In the previous chapter we pointed out however, that there is slight wavering in the conception of God as a person. There is a tendency towards an impersonal conception. The more the aesthetic over-shadows the ethical the more this tendency will be visible.

But the Supreme Person, the centre of all reality, is not merely a passive, a negatively receptive Being. He is active. He is the joy which reveals itself in forms. It is His will which creates.¹⁰ He seeks His self-expression in creation. His nature is *Anandam*, joy, bliss. 'From joy are born all creatures'; 'The immortal being manifests himself in joy-form', are Upanishadic words which Tagore

¹ *Gitanjali*, no. 75.

² See above, p. 104.

³ W. James: *A Pluralistic Universe*, *passim*.

⁴ D. P. Mukerji: *Tagore*, 31.

^{5, 6, 7, 8} *Personality*, 98.

^{9, 10} *Personality*, 99.

loved to quote.¹ His manifestation in creation is out of his fulness of joy. It is the nature of this abounding joy to realise itself in form which is law. 'The joy, which is without form, must create, must translate itself into forms.'² The soul of this world is 'aching for expression in its endless rhythm of lines and colours, music and movements, hints, whispers, and all the suggestions of the inexpressible.'³ He is 'the great Artist', the 'great Master',⁴ the 'Eternal Player' who 'plays his dance-music of creation'.⁵ We feel him and meet him in the beauty, the joy and the love of the world. 'In the mere substance and law of this world we do not meet the Person, but where the sky is blue, and the grass is green, where the flower has its beauty and fruit its taste, where there is not only perpetuation of race, but joy of living and love of fellow-creatures, sympathy and self-sacrifice, there is revealed to us the Person, who is infinite.'⁶ In *Gitanjali* it is expressed in this way:

That I should make much of myself and turn it on all sides,
thus casting coloured shadows on thy radiance—
Such is thy *maya*.

Thou settest a barrier in thine own being
and then callest thy severed self in myriad notes.
This thy self-separation has taken body in me.

The poignant song is echoed through all the sky
in many-coloured tears and smiles, alarms and hopes;
waves rise up and sink again,
dreams break and form.

In me is thy own defeat of self.

This screen that thou hast raised is painted
with innumerable figures with the brush of the night and the
day.

Behind it thy seat is woven in wondrous mysteries of curves
casting away all barren lines of straightness.

The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky.
With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant,
and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me.⁷

There is a game of 'hiding and seeking' going on between the finite soul and the infinite. They two belong to each other. The Supreme

¹ *Sādhana*, 78, 103, 104, 107, 114, etc.

² *Ib.*, 104.

³ *Personality*, 32.

⁴ *Ib.*, 74.

⁵ *Ib.*, 55.

⁶ *Ib.*, 32.

⁷ *Gitanjali*, no. 71.

Person is 'aching' to express Himself in finite beings; and they are always in search of the Infinite. Like the King of the Dark Chamber He hides Himself from immediate observation. But once the eyes have been opened to His glory the Queen will meet her King at every step.¹

This game of hiding and seeking is a love-game. Love, Tagore insists, is the perfect personal relationship. 'In love the sense of difference is obliterated and the human soul fulfils its purpose in perfection, transcending the limits of itself and reaching across the threshold of the infinite. Therefore love is the highest bliss that man can attain to, for through it alone he truly knows that he is more than himself, and that he is at one with the All.'²

We are made conscious of this truth of relationship immediately within us in our own love and in the joy it gives. From this experience of ours we have the right to say that God is love. The Supreme One, who relates all things, comprehends the universe, is all love—the love that is the highest truth being the most perfect relationship. God is 'the Supreme Lover' whose touch we experience in all our relations of love. The hall of union is there where dwells the Lover in the heart of existence.³

God is love. He gives Himself.⁴ His love is absolutely unselfish and free; it does not exercise force or coercion. 'By all means they try to hold me secure who love me in this world. But it is otherwise with thy love which is greater than theirs, and thou keepest me free.'⁵ God's love is quietly waiting for response:

If I call not thee in my prayers,
if I keep not thee in my heart,
thy love for me still waits for my love⁶

His love is always seeking men, present with them on their way, although they may not know it. 'He came before you did—who else could have sent you on the road?' These words of Surangama to the Queen⁷ indeed sound like a statement of the doctrine of prevenient grace. In *Gitanjali* this is brought out in a poem in this way:

The day was when I did not keep myself in readiness for thee;
and entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common crowd
unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity
upon many a fleeting moment of my life.⁸

¹ *The King of the Dark Chamber*, 193.

² *Sādhana*, 28.

³ *The Religion of Man*, 105 ff. ⁴ *Personality*, 62.

^{5,6} *Gitanjali*, no. 32.

⁷ *The King of the Dark Chamber*, 189.

⁸ *Gitanjali*, no. 43.

God's love is patient and persistent, and at last it wins its goal:

I fled and fled behind my day's work and my night's dreams.
But his claims followed me at every breath I drew.

Thus I came to know that I am known to him,
and no place left which is mine.

Now I wish to lay my all before his feet,
and gain the right to my place in his kingdom.¹

It is clear that this love-theology does not come from the Upanishads. In a previous chapter we pointed out how readily Tagore transformed the Upanishadic *ānanda*, joy, into love.² To a certain extent this feature in Tagore's religion, without any doubt, can be explained by his Vaishnavite tradition. To everyone who has acquired even a surface knowledge of Vaishnavite poetry, especially that of Bengal, it is obvious how much Tagore owes to these poets. To them also 'love' is a key-word. That this fact in all probability is partly due to underground Christian influence was mentioned in a previous chapter.³

But the Vaishnavite influence cannot fully explain Tagore's conception of religious love. There are certain features in it which point to a direct Christian influence. Already Tagore's emphasis on love at the heart of existence is such a feature. In Vaishnavite poetry the emphasis falls rather on the *bhakta's* love to God than on God's love. God is 'the beloved', the supreme object of love.⁴ Glimpses of God's goodness and love in that poetry can by no means be compared to Tagore's definite emphasis on love as the heart of all existence.

The supreme love, in Tagore's conception, takes the shape of fatherly love. Now, this is not an exclusively Christian feature. In Saivism Siva occasionally can be called 'Father'. We meet it in Vaishnavism also. Arjuna prays to Krishna to bear with him as a father with a son,⁵ and the *Bhagavan* assures him that he is 'the father of the universe, the mother and the grandsire'.⁶ Outside Indian religions we find Zeus and Jupiter called 'father', and in Nordic religion Wotan, the chief god, was called 'the father of all'.

In this matter two things should be borne in mind. First, in all

¹ *Fruit-Gathering*, no. 32.

² See above, p. 17.

³ See above, pp. 20 f.

⁴ *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, nos. 51, 52, etc., etc.

⁵ *Bhagavadgītā*, 11: 44.

⁶ *Ib.*, 9: 17.

these cases the name 'father' is just one name among many others; it belongs to the circumference of the picture, whereas in the New Testament it is *the* name of God; there it forms the very centre of the conception. Secondly, it is, after all, not the name that is decisive, but the atmosphere, the spirit, the filial relationship out of which it is born. In this respect the New Testament use of the father-name is unique. It is through the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit that we are restored to, or rather re-born into, the lost sonship of God. 'As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name.'¹ 'And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father.'²

In Tagore's conception of God as Father we do not find the depth and the richness implied in the Christian fatherhood of God, but there is something of that filial relationship to God which is characteristic of the Christian attitude. 'O God, my father, the world of sins remove from me', he prays.³ *Pita no bodhi*, as he taught his boys at Santiniketan to pray, he interprets: 'Let me wake up in the light of this great truth—Thou art my Father.'⁴ He knows that 'we have to be born into this great idea of the father. That is the end and object of man, the fulfilment of his life.'⁵ He loves to read into old texts this idea of God's fatherhood. *Vishvānūdēva savitar duratāni parāsuva*, he translates: 'Father, completely sweep away all my sins.'⁶ When he says: 'We must be one with our father, we must be perfect as he is',⁷ it points for its source directly to the word of Jesus: 'Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'⁸

The decisive testimony for the Christian influence on Tagore's God-conception is his view of the 'suffering God'. If love is taken seriously it involves the possibility of suffering, not only sympathy with the beloved, but the hardest of all suffering, the suffering of rejected love, forlorn love. Because it is in the very nature of love that it cannot be compelled or forced, there is always this possibility of love's suffering. The deeper and richer love is, the greater is the possibility of its suffering. If God is love, He is also 'a suffering God'. If His love transcends all human love, His suffering also reaches beyond human experience and understanding. It is strange that although the Bible and the Christian hymnwriting are full of this

¹ John 1: 12.² Gal. 4: 6.^{3,4} *Personality*, 163.⁵ *Ib.*, 161.⁶ *Sādhana*, 38.⁷ *Ib.*, 159.⁸ Matt. 5: 48.

thought it has often for long periods been absent from Christian theology. To the present writer this seems to be due to the longstanding dominating influence of Greek philosophy on Christian theology, first through Neo-Platonism in Christian mysticism, and then, from the twelfth century onwards, through Aristotelian Scholasticism and Protestant Orthodoxy. The Greek conception of God was dominated by the metaphysical idea of God as the Absolute to which no such thing as suffering could possibly be attributed. But the truth of the suffering God is at the very centre of the Christian faith, and from the beginning of this century it has come more and more to the forefront in Christian theology.¹

The idea of the suffering God is totally alien to Hindu religion. The Puranic legend of Nilakanta, Siva drinking the poison in order to save the gods and the world from ruin, and other myths of the same kind, cannot seriously be adduced in this connection. Nor can the Vedic saying, 'God from the heat of his pain created all that there is', with truth be said to indicate the idea of suffering love.² For the idea underlying such sayings is by no means that of suffering for others, but that of gaining supernatural power through the 'heat', *tapas*, of austerities.³ Such tales and sayings were never understood to indicate the idea of self-sacrificing divine love until the Christian faith made India acquainted with God's self-sacrificing love. It is deeply significant that the most renowned Hindu symbol of God is that of Siva Natarājāh, the dancing Siva—God's work is like a dance, a joyful play—whereas the Christian symbol is a cross, the instrument of graceless suffering.

There are in Hindu literature scanty glimpses of suffering for others, like that of Harichandra, Nandanar, Prahladha and Mirabai, whom Mr. Gandhi loved to point to as examples of non-violence. But Dr. A. J. Appasamy rightly points out that their suffering, not only in regards to its depth but still more in regard to its purpose, was different from that of Christ. They suffered, but they were not primarily thinking of others but of themselves. 'Their example has been telling. Multitudes of men and women in India through the centuries have got a new vision of God through them. They have been led to follow him with deeper devotion because of their lives.

¹ J. Sandegren: *The Suffering God*, 6 f.

² *Creative Unity*, 40.

³ P. Deussen: *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie*, 10, 4 Aufl., 1: 1, 82 ff.; 1: 2, 60 ff.

But primarily they did not suffer for the sake of others. They were thinking of themselves first and foremost.¹

Moreover, here we are not concerned about the question of vicarious suffering by men but about the suffering God. According to Hindu thought God cannot suffer. Two doctrines stand in the way of such a thought: the *karma*-doctrine and the thought of God as *ānanda*.² If there is an inflexible law of equivalent retributive suffering, how can there be any room for the suffering of God? Still more, the Hindu conception of God hinders any thought of God as suffering. He is perfect *ānanda*, bliss. The picture which the *Bhagavadgītā* gives of God is modelled on the perfect *yogin*, a being totally 'unattached', 'unconcerned', 'unmoved', undisturbed by sorrow and pain. Therefore God's love has never been taken seriously in Hinduism, for the obvious reason that love implies suffering. As the *yogin* in the *Bhagavadgītā* is advised not to love nor to hate anybody, so also God is said neither to love nor to hate.³ It has been suggested that God possesses a painless sympathy (in the *Bhagavadgītā* God is said to have compassion on His creatures). This statement contains a contradiction in itself. Painless sympathy is no sympathy at all. Bertrand Brasnett⁴ is right in pointing out that 'there is something positively immoral about an apathetic God'.

The biblical picture of God is quite different. We see a God full of love and compassion.⁵ And the Cross, according to the New Testament the highest manifestation of God's love, unveils a picture of God quite different from the Hindu one. God is not 'unconcerned', 'unmoved' and 'undisturbed'. On the contrary, He is so disturbed, so concerned, so moved that He sacrifices Himself for the salvation of man. 'Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us.'⁶ 'God loved the world so dearly that He gave up His only Son.'⁷ The salvation of man could not, like creation, be achieved by an almighty word, it cost a great self-sacrifice on God's part. Luther, in the hymn quoted above,⁸ has given a hint on the difference of the ease with which God created the world—with a sovereign word—and the pain and sacrifice of salvation—'His very best it cost Him'. C. S. Paul has shown that the idea of a suffering God is

¹ A. J. Appasamy: *The Gospel and India's Heritage*, 242.

² C. S. Paul: *The Suffering God*, 29.

³ *Bhagavadgītā*, 9: 29.

⁴ *The Suffering of the Impassable God*, 15.

⁵ J. Sandegren: *The Suffering God*, 16 ff.

⁶ 1 John 3: 16.

⁷ John 3: 16 (Moffat's translation).

⁸ See p. 52.

not contradictory to the idea of God's omnipotence and sovereignty. On the contrary, only a God who loves His creatures and suffers with them and for them can evoke our true adoration.¹ 'A God who could command may be almighty in a world of automations. But in the moral world of self-determining personalities the Suffering God is the only Almighty God.'² There is nothing unreasonable, therefore, in the idea of the suffering God. Yet I feel that even if the Cross is not unreasonable, there is something in it that transcends human understanding; there is something mysterious about it—*mysterium crucis*!

It is strange, indeed, that the Christian faith has sometimes been blamed for having nothing to say on the problem of suffering and no consolation for it. It seems to me that the deepest word that has ever been said on this problem is the word of the Cross, which reveals not only the depth of the corporate guilt of human sin, but also, and above all, the mysterious fact that God Himself enters into human suffering and takes it upon Himself in order to remove its cause, the curse of sin, through His own suffering under it. In comparison with this fact any other solution of the problem of suffering seems superficial and cheap.

Tagore has caught a glimpse of God's suffering. 'In love is freedom,' he says, 'therefore God has not only to wait till our souls, out of their own will, bring themselves into harmony with his own, but also to suffer when there are obstacles and rebellions.'³ 'Freedom has often taken the negative course to prove that it is freedom—and man has suffered and God with him. . . . But, I ask, has this giant Spirit of negation won? Has it not its greatest defeat in the suffering it has caused in the heart of the infinite?'⁴

The influence of the Gospel on Tagore's conception of God is undisputable. Yet it has not been taken over wholesale or unchanged. It is only occasionally that his thought delves into this depth. Generally it moves more on the surface. The dominant figure of God in his poetry is the dancing God, the 'Master musician', the keen call of whose flute he is following—the thought of God's suffering is drowned in the joy of the dance and the music of the love-game of hide and seek. Even in the very last poem from his hand this comes to light. 'Your creation's path you have covered with a varied net of wills, Thou Guileful One.'⁵ God's love, characteristically enough, is

¹ C. S. Paul: *The Suffering God*, 190 ff.

² *Ib.*, 220.

³ *Personality*, 102 f.

⁴ *Poems*, no. 129.

⁵ *Ib.*, no. 29; *The Religion of Man*, 106; *Personality*, 27.

revealed to him chiefly in the beauty of nature and in human relationship.¹ Even sexual passion is to him a revelation, or rather a part, of God's love. This has given a peculiar character to his poetry: it is love-poetry and spiritual poetry at the same time.

In Christian hymn-writing and devotional literature also, as is well-known, the love between the bride and the bridegroom is often used to illustrate the relationship between God and soul. But there it is entirely metaphorical. It is otherwise with Tagore. In his poetry erotic love and spiritual love are indissolubly interwoven. 'Tagore's love-poems', Professor Mukerji remarks, 'were seldom pure';² 'really, one never knows if the poet was addressing a woman or a deity.'³

It goes without saying that God's love should always be allowed to sanctify and transfigure our human relationships, and also that in our relationships of human love we experience, in a way, God's love and goodness. But this is a thing quite different from the *identification* of divine and human love. It is obvious that in such identification God's love is dragged down to a lower level. And if we look to human relationships of love as the chief revelation of Love, we are sure to miss the really divine quality of it. We shall get *eros* but not *agape*.

Bishop Anders Nygren, in his monumental work *Agape and Eros*, has made the difference between these two very clear.⁴ *Agape*, the New Testament expression for God's love, comes down from heaven to man. It is spontaneous, 'uncaused'; that is to say, it is vain to look for any cause or explanation for God's love in any value or worthiness of man. It is indifferent to human merits. For it is creative; that which in itself is without value gets value by the fact that it is the object of God's love. *Agape* opens the way of fellowship with God.⁵

Eros, on the other hand—by which is meant not simply sensual love, but human love refined and used as a religious principle—is the love of desire, egocentric love, man's way to the divine, man's attempt, by his own means and resources, to climb up to the divine.⁶

From our account of Tagore's God-idea it is clear that it contains some features of *agape*, some elements of the Christian conception of love. God's love is prevenient to ours, it is self-sacrificing, giving itself. The spirit of love dwells in the boundless riches of the

^{1,2} D. P. Mukerji: *Tagore*, 25.

³ *Ib.*, 75.

⁴ Anders Nygren: *Agape and Eros: A Study of the Christian Idea of Love*, Vols. 1-3. London 1932-1939.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, Part I, 52 ff.

⁶ *Ib.*, 33 ff.

surplus;¹ therefore its very nature is to give. Yet the real significance of Tagore's conception of love is not that of *agape*. That is evident already from the definition of love. 'The fact can never be ignored that we have our greatest delight when we realize ourselves in others, and this is the definition of love.'² For this is egotism in its most refined form. But the decisive evidence is found in Tagore's conception of salvation, which is self-redemption and not an act of God's grace.³

This is corroborated by another line of thought which is very prominent in Tagore's writings, namely, the idea that our love is a completion of God's love. This view makes God's love come forth, not out of surplus, but out of want. Without our love God's love is imperfect. In his account of his basic religious experiences Tagore said: 'The infinite became defined in humanity and came close to me so as to need my love and co-operation.'⁴ This 'need' is seriously meant. 'For the God in Man depends upon men's service and men's love for his own love's fulfilment.'⁵ God's love would be nothing without the response of man's love. 'O thou Lord of all heavens, where would be thy love if I were not?'⁶ the poet exclaims.

This idea Tagore had learnt from the poor Baul-poets of Bengal,⁷ whose influence on him was strong. In their piety and poetry this idea is a dominant feature. According to Tagore, they say that God's will, in giving His love, finds its completeness in man's will returning that love. Humanity, therefore, is a necessary factor in the perfection of the divine truth.⁸ This 'dignity of man' has found a proud expression in a song of the Bauls, which Tagore translates thus:

My longing is to meet you in play of love, my Lover;
But this longing is not only mine, but also yours.
For your lips can have their smile, and your flute its music,
Only in your delight in my love;
And therefore you are importunate, even as I am.⁹

Tagore makes the following comments on this verse: 'The poet proudly says: "Your flute could not have its music of beauty if your delight were not in my love. Your power is great—and there I am not equal to you—but it lies even in me to make you smile, and if you

¹ *The Religion of Man*, 50.

² *Ib.*, 49.

³ See above, pp. 137 f.

⁴ *The Religion of Man*, 96.

⁵ *Ib.*, 72.

⁶ *Gitanjali*, no. 56.

⁷ See above, p. 22.

⁸ *Creative Unity*, 80.

⁹ *Ib.*, 81.

and I never meet, then this play of love remains incomplete."¹ Tagore adds: 'If this were not true, then it would be an utter humiliation to exist at all in this world.'²

Such utterances, whatever grain of truth they may contain, do not exhibit the humility which is characteristic of true religion. They call to one's mind the unanimous testimony of the Old as well as of the New Testament that 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.'³ 'In genuine religion', says Professor Wheeler Robinson, 'the emphasis always falls on God, not on man. To neglect this is to offer a substitute for religion, or to show grave misunderstanding of its nature. . . . And just because of that emphasis, and all it implies, the fundamental religious quality in man is humility. So far as there is pride, religion is absent.'⁴

The *bhakti* of Vaishnavism culminates in complete surrender to God. Precisely for that reason Tagore could never become a wholesale Vaishnavite. He was reluctant to undergo this 'utter humiliation' of a complete self-surrender.⁵ We meet in his writings an abundance of beautiful poems of praise and adoration. The grand hymn to the Eternal, in which all the beauty of *Gitanjali* is condensed, is significant: 'In one salutation to thee, my God. . . .'⁶ Yet in spite of all admiration and love, he proudly maintained 'the dignity of man', the presupposition of which, in his opinion, is God's need of man as well as man's need of God.

Professor Mukerji quotes a statement by Professor S. M. Das Gupta, which is significant: 'No doubt he (Tagore) has admitted that the "I" has no existence separate from God, but (for him) a deeper and more mystic truth is that God has no existence separate from that of the "I".'⁷ With such a doctrine one has come far away from the Christian faith, and, to be sure, from any real religion.

Such an attitude is incompatible with the doctrine of salvation through grace, but it goes well with the idea of man's self-realisation.

It is also well compatible with another feature of Tagore's conception of God, *viz.*, the humanity of God. This has nothing to do with the doctrine of incarnation, Hindu or Christian. In a previous chapter we pointed out that Tagore firmly believed in the Hindu doctrine of the divinity of man. But this doctrine can easily be turned upside down. For if man is divine, the corollary will be that God is

¹⁻² *Ib.*

³ James 4: 6; 1 Peter 5: 5; Prov. 3: 34 (Sept.).

⁴ H. Wheeler Robinson: *Redemption and Revelation*, 74.

⁵ Cf. D. P. Mukerji: *Tagore*, 79.

^{6,7} *Gitanjali*, no. 103.

human. This is exactly Tagore's view, emphatically stated in many ways. 'The idea of the humanity of our God, or the divinity of Man the Eternal, is the main subject of this book', he states in the opening chapter of *The Religion of Man*.¹ In words which remind us of Auguste Comte, he describes this religion: 'The individual man must exist for Man the great, and must express him in disinterested works, in science and philosophy, in literature and arts, in service and worship. This is his religion, which is working in the heart of all his religions in various names and forms.'²

Tagore asserts that he has not arrived at this thought of the humanity of God through any process of philosophical reasoning. 'On the contrary', he says, 'it has followed the current of my temperament from early days until it suddenly flashed into my consciousness with a direct vision.'³

This may be true; yet it does not, of course, exclude the possibility that influences from without have been helping in the formation of the content of the 'vision'. Whether the philosophy of Auguste Comte and his religion of humanity, 'the Great Being', had to some extent influenced Tagore is difficult to say. With the positivistic philosophy in general he had, in any case, very little in common. More likely the poetry of the Bauls has exercised some influence on Tagore on this point also. In a previous chapter we pointed out that the name Tagore gave to his religion, 'The Religion of Man', was due to Baul influence. The God whom the Bauls worship and who dwells in the heart they call simply 'the Man'. Tagore quotes a line from a village poet from Bengal:

Man seeks the man in me
and I lose myself and run out.⁴

And another sings of the Ideal Man:

Listen, O brother man (declares Chandidas),
the truth of man is the highest truth,
there is no other truth above it.⁵

It would be a false assumption to think that Tagore worships empirical humanity as God. He emphatically rejects 'the intellectual cult of humanity, which is like a body that has tragically lost itself in the purgatory of shadows'.⁶ It is 'the Ideal Man', 'Man the Eternal, Man the Divine', in whom he believes.⁷ The empirical man

^{1,2,3} P. 17.

⁴ *Ib.*, 112.

^{5,6} *Ib.*, 113.

⁷ *Ib.*, 71.

is incomplete, but he is moving towards the ideal; and the goal to which he, in his collective growth, is nearing is the ideal Man.¹

It is easy to see that in this way man is made the ultimate truth, as the Bengali poet said: 'The truth of man is the highest truth, there is no other truth above it', or, in Tagore's own words: 'The ultimate Truth for us is *human* Truth.'²

The consequences of this God-conception are obvious. Thereby God's transcendence is given up. He is, after all, a being of this world. He is not the Holy One, inspiring awe and claiming my worship and total allegiance.

It is quite understandable that, in spite of many beautiful hymns of praise and adoration to this god, I maintain my dignity as man and refuse to bow down to him in complete self-surrender. My proper response to him will be that of self-discipline, self-development, self-realisation, and my proper worship of him will be that of self-expression in art.

Professor Einstein's remark on Tagore's religion, related by the poet himself in one of his books, is very significant. Tagore, in a lengthy discussion with the scientist, had explained his religion to him, the religion of man. Einstein's final remark was this: 'Then I am more religious than you are!'³

¹ *Ib.*, 165.

² *Man*, 28.

³ *The Religion of Man*, 225.

X

CONCLUSION

We have come to the end of our investigation. For the sake of space we have had to leave out many problems which would have been interesting enough to discuss, although not so essential for our present purpose. It remains to sum up our findings in a few final conclusions.

Tagore had a definite aversion against everything that savoured of dogma or theology or any kind of formulated creed. He pours much scorn on theologians and believers in 'sectarian creeds'.

Your speech is simple, my Master,
but not theirs who talk of you.¹

His own religion has no creed, no dogma, no theological doctrine 'to be taught as a subject in the class, for half an hour each day'.² The reader will note that we have had no occasion to speak of the Church, because nothing corresponding to this important reality in the Christian faith comes within the circumspection of 'the poet's religion'. His religion is 'the spiritual truth and beauty of our attitude towards our surroundings, our conscious relationship with the Infinite, and the lasting power of the Eternal in the passing moments of our life'.³ In order to make such a religious ideal possible it is necessary 'to live in intimate touch with nature, daily to grow in an atmosphere of service offered to all creatures, tending trees, feeding birds and animals, learning to feel the immense mystery of the soil and water and air'.⁴

Tagore defends the freedom of his religion. 'Those who are habituated to the rigid framework of sectarian creeds will find such a religion as this too indefinite and elastic. No doubt it is so, but only because its ambition is not to shackle the Infinite and tame it for domestic use; but rather to help our consciousness to emancipate itself from materialism. It is as indefinite as the morning, and yet as luminous; it calls our thoughts, feelings, and actions into freedom, and feeds them with light. In the poet's religion we find no doctrine or injunction, but rather the attitude of our entire being towards the truth

¹ *Fruit-Gathering*, 15.

^{2,3,4} *Creative Unity*, 201.

which is ever to be revealed in its own endless creation. In dogmatic religion all questions are definitely answered, all doubts are finally laid to rest. But the poet's religion is fluid like the atmosphere round the earth where lights and shadows play their hide-and-seek, and the wind like a shepherd boy plays upon its reeds among flocks of clouds. It never undertakes to lead anybody anywhere to any solid conclusion; yet it reveals endless spheres of light, because it has no walls round itself.¹

This spirited and poetical defence of the formlessness of 'the poet's religion' is fascinating; and in view of all the damage to true religion caused by endless theological controversies and narrow-minded insistence on 'sectarian creeds' it is quite understandable that by many even this formlessness of his religion is felt as a liberation. Yet, for all the mischiefs and crimes committed by theologians and 'those who are habituated to the rigid framework of sectarian creeds', we should not make the poet's mistake of going to the other extreme of condemning creeds and theology altogether. There is very little originality in such an attitude; for criticism and scorn of creeds and theologians have been a beloved theme everywhere and at all times. Yet the fact that they still exist may be due, not only to the toughness of evil, but to the fact that they too serve some useful purpose. Employing an illustration which Tagore himself has used, in a different context, we may ask: Must not the river have its boundaries, its banks? A river is not all banks, nor are the banks the final facts about the river. Yet they are necessary, if there is to be any river at all. 'And do not these obstructions themselves give its water an onward motion?'² Creeds and doctrines may be compared to the banks of the river. They should not be mistaken for the river, for if there is no water, the 'river' has become only a barren bed of sand where no life can grow. Yet the banks are necessary elements of the river; they give its water its 'onward motion'.

Fascinating though 'the poet's religion' is, it seems too vague, too much a matter of suggestion, of 'hide-and-seek', to be a real source of power in the hard strife of life. Professor D. P. Mukerji, to whose excellent study of Tagore we have had the opportunity of referring many times in this book, has given a summary of the content of Tagore's philosophy as it appears in his poetry. This summary seems to grasp the flickering character of Tagore's poetical

¹ *Ib.*, 16.

² *Sādhana*, 47.

philosophy marvellously well: 'Tagore's poetry has created a world of its own. This world is not physical, not rational, not intellectual, not one of categories and statements. It is primarily one of feeling, generally avoiding passion or strong emotion. The feelings are variegated, each one subtle, fugitive, delicate, sensitive. It is a world of galvanometers and crescographs registering the slightest reaction, not of the heart and the brain, but of some intermediate organ or some nerve-ganglion or some unknown gland from which the general awareness of beauty and sensibility is secreted. This awareness speaks in verse, in images, similes and metaphors, and volubly too. The lineaments of specific feelings or objects melt into one another, Nature (the nature of riverine Bengal) blending into the behaviour of man (the Universal man usually, the common man occasionally) and man merging into the Divine, who is of course neither the Brahman of Shankar nor the Blue Lord of the Vaishnavite. This universe of sensibilities and of sensitive awareness is so complete in itself, so human, so beautiful and so joyous that it appears to be a counterpart of this universe, its substratum, its culmination, its abiding truthfulness.'¹

The aesthetical character of Tagore's religion and philosophy of life is obvious. In the previous chapters we more than once have had reason to point out the dominance of the aesthetical elements in his religious experiences. His was a mind utterly sensitive to beauty. His approach to truth was along the avenue of beauty. This may be a fully legitimate approach, if only we are not satisfied to stop there. For beauty is only a suggestion, a hint towards the Eternal. To satisfy ourselves with that kind of revelation, therefore, inevitably must result in an utterly vague religion. Not only that: it can easily make aestheticism a substitute for real religion. This seems to have been the case with many of Tagore's admirers, especially in the West. A passage in W. B. Yeats' Introduction to *Gitanjali* is significant in this respect; 'We had not known that we loved God, hardly it may be that we believed in Him; yet looking backward upon our life we discover, in our exploration of the pathways of woods, in our delight in the lonely places of hills, in that mysterious claim that we have made, unavailingly, on the women that we have loved, the emotion that created this insidious sweetness.'²

Such a religion will easily assist us in evading God and His

¹ D. P. Mukerji: *Tagore*, 97 f.

² *Gitanjali*, p. xix.

claims on us. A merely aesthetical religion, even when it is at its best, will always, for obvious reasons, be a very imperfect religion. Beauty is not the whole truth. The realities of life exhibit also sterner aspects of truth. There are the facts of sin and evil. But in Tagore's philosophy there is the tendency to overlook them and make religion merely a religion of art or, rather, to identify art and religion.

We have pointed out in a previous chapter that such an identification can be proved, by way of epistemological analysis, to be a mistake.¹ Art, science, ethics and religion can be said to be the four main activities of the spirit.² Neither can be identified with any of the others. But whereas science, art and ethics can be more or less co-ordinated, religion occupies a special position, inasmuch as the religious category underlies the three others as their basis. Viewed from the other end, it implies that science, art and ethics have their consummation in religion.³ This relationship between religion and the three other activities of the spirit makes it possible not only to approach religion along each one of these three avenues and even to integrate them into the religious life, but also to mistake them or substitute them for religion. The history of religion as well as the history of the Christian Church shows a number of such mistakes. If knowledge is mistaken for religion, we shall have rationalism; if it is ethics, we shall have moralism; if art, we shall have aestheticism. But in all these cases we shall land on a sub-religious level and have only a substitute for religion. This is fatal. For it does not mean only that we satisfy ourselves with something that is less than the best: it means that we deceive ourselves; we are positively led astray; we shall miss the goal.

I do not contend that Tagore was merely an artist. His art brought him further than to mere aestheticism; certainly it brought him within the halls of religion, and much of his poetry must be classified as religious poetry. The case may be worse with many of his admirers and followers, especially in the West, who certainly satisfy themselves with mere aestheticism. Yet it may be questioned whether Tagore himself reached a really religious foundation of life.

¹ See above, p. 55, note 2.

² It must be considered a grave mistake, indeed, that Clutton-Brock, in his little charming book *The Ultimate Belief*, has altogether omitted religion as an activity of the spirit.

³ William Temple: *Mens Creatrix*.

Professor Mukerji touches upon this question. It is a decisive question whether the world which Tagore pictures to our enthused eyes in his poetry is a real one. In Professor Mukerji's opinion, 'it appears to be a substitute one'.¹ He has arrived at this conclusion on scientific grounds. Tagore realised the importance of science, he praised it sometimes in high terms, he borrowed metaphors from it, he utilised its governing attitude to combat superstitions and old ideologies, but 'he did not fully square the scientific attitude with the Religion of Man'.²

I think Professor Mukerji is right in this observation. But I have felt compelled in the previous chapters of this book, more than once, to question the truth of 'the poet's religion' on purely religious grounds. The deepest religious truths, those of sin and grace, were not revealed to him in his basic religious experiences. They remained hidden to him throughout his life. Mostly he stayed in the outer courts of the temple. For these reasons I would answer Professor Mukerji's question: 'Can this world's contradictions be resolved by the experiences of a Tagore-world?'³ in the negative. 'It is a magnificent edifice of thought and beauty he has erected,' says W. S. Urquhart, 'but there is a certain instability about the whole edifice.'

'The poet's religion' was a river with many tributaries. In the opening chapter of this book we found that influences from many different quarters had contributed to its formation. Tagore's was a religion of a typically eclectic character. In this respect he was a true son of the religion of his Motherland. For nothing is more characteristic of Hinduism than its generous hospitality to all kinds of religious beliefs, views and practices. Here lies its strength; for this elastic attitude puts it in a position to receive without danger and survive any attack from other religions. But here is also its most serious weakness. For this attitude makes it unwilling seriously to face the question of truth. Everything may pass as good, everything can be explained in some way or other. This attitude makes Hinduism dangerous to sincerity. It contains many 'truths', and many half-truths, which is dangerous, and much untruth, which is the worst of all. In spite of all earnest seeking after truth, Hinduism as a system constantly avoids the confrontation with the Majesty of

^{1,2} D. P. Mukerji: *Tagore*, 99.

³ 'The Philosophical Inheritance of Rabindranath Tagore', *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. XXVI, 410.

Truth. It makes too many 'experiments with truth'. If one really stands face to face with the Majesty of Truth there is no room for experiments. The only choice left is a no, or unconditional surrender.

Among the many tributaries to the Religion of Man was also Christianity. The influence of the Christian faith on Tagore should never have been denied by any scholar who claims to be sincere. In many ways, direct and indirect, apparent and hidden, the power of the Gospel has exercised its influence on the thought of Tagore. It has helped in casting out many things from his religious heritage as unworthy and incompatible with his modern religious conceptions. It has also helped him to detect many a grain of truth in his ancestral religion and make it glow with a new splendour in the light of the Gospel. He has by no means always been aware of this fact or cared to acknowledge that the light was borrowed. Yet, nevertheless, to a sincere investigation it is certain that it was so.

On the other hand, nothing has been taken over wholesale or unchanged. Everything has been curtailed or transmuted, so as to fit in with its new environment. This is the reason why much that on the surface may look Christian in 'the poet's religion', to a closer scrutiny reveals itself as not Christian at all; it has been transmuted and inserted into a context which is foreign to it.

Especially we have found that the most central facts of the Christian faith remained hidden to the originator of the Religion of Man. He felt no need of a historic revelation, of God coming down to man. Christ is to him a great teacher, one of the greatest, but nothing more. Still less did he feel the need of the Saviour. The real situation of sinful humanity he refused to see. He touched upon the *mysterium crucis*, but he did not grasp it. The Cross had nothing to say to him. Salvation through the grace of God was alien to his religious conception. His relation to God, therefore, is not that of faith, of a redeemed sinner, but that of a partner in a love-game. And the meaning of life is not that of sanctification through the Holy Spirit, but that of self-realisation through art.

The reason for this is easy to see. It is to be found in his experience of God. In spite of all lofty thoughts and sentiments, God is, after all, not a holy reality to him. He played so much in the outskirts of the temple that, when he occasionally peeped into the sanctuary, he was not able to see the Holy Majesty of God, but only a god of this world, an image of man.

Tagore had a passionate love for humanity. This love urged him to the intensive work for mankind to which he devoted so much of his time and his strength, the work for the uplift of the poor and downtrodden, for the education of youth, for the reconciliation of nations, and a better mutual understanding of different races. His long journeys to different parts of the world, his numerous addresses, his educational institutions at Santiniketan and Sriniketan, are all expressions of this great interest in humanity. This interest and this unflinching work for the realisation of the rich potentialities of man make him one of the great men of his time.

Yet, when it comes to the underlying religious ideas, it must be said that the foundation is too weak. His god is not strong enough to carry us through all the strifes and conflicts of life. He is not able to save us. 'The poet's religion' is, after all, only a religion of man.

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ERRATA

- P. 64, lines 2 and 20, and p. 73, line 15, for '*Brāhma*' read '*Brahma*'.
 P. 90, note 3, for '84' read '88'.
 P. 108, line 36, for 'Kraemer' read 'Cremer'.
 P. 143, note 2, for 'Moffatt' read 'Moffatt's'.